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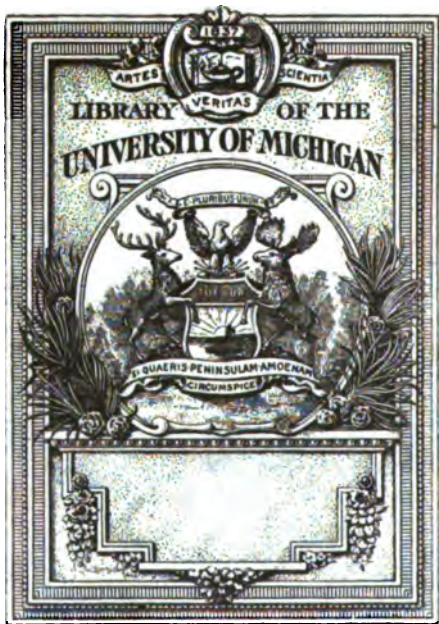
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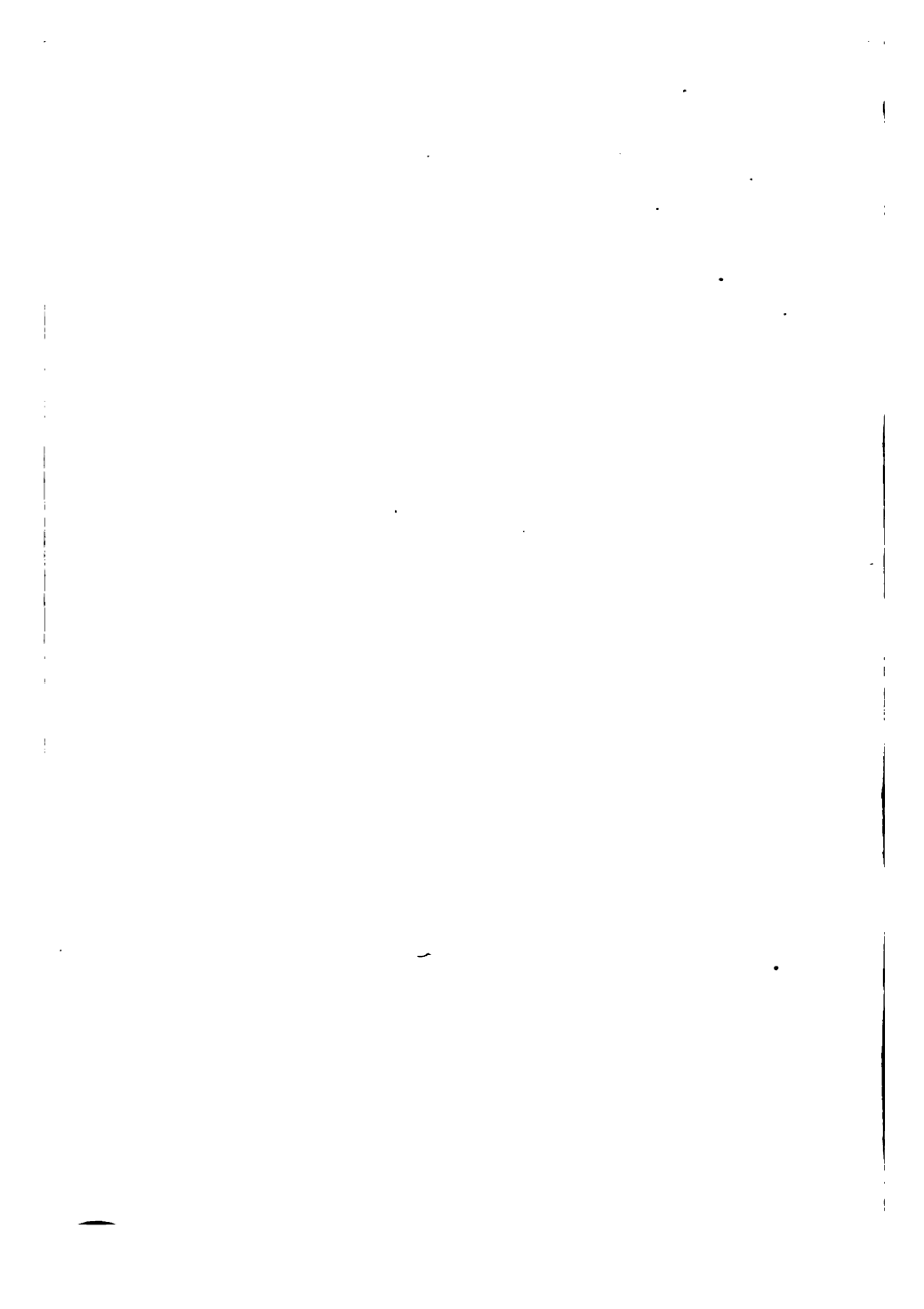
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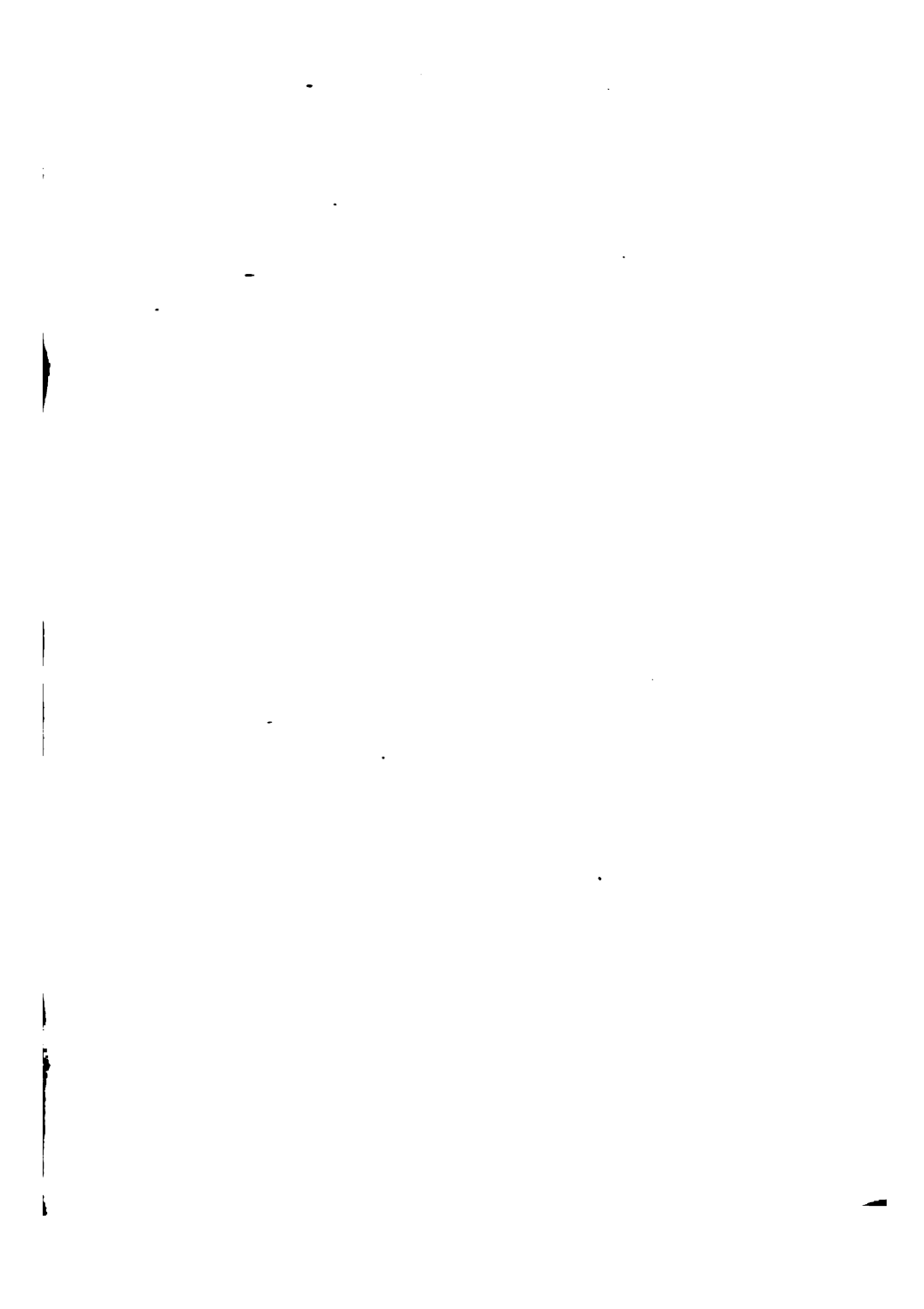
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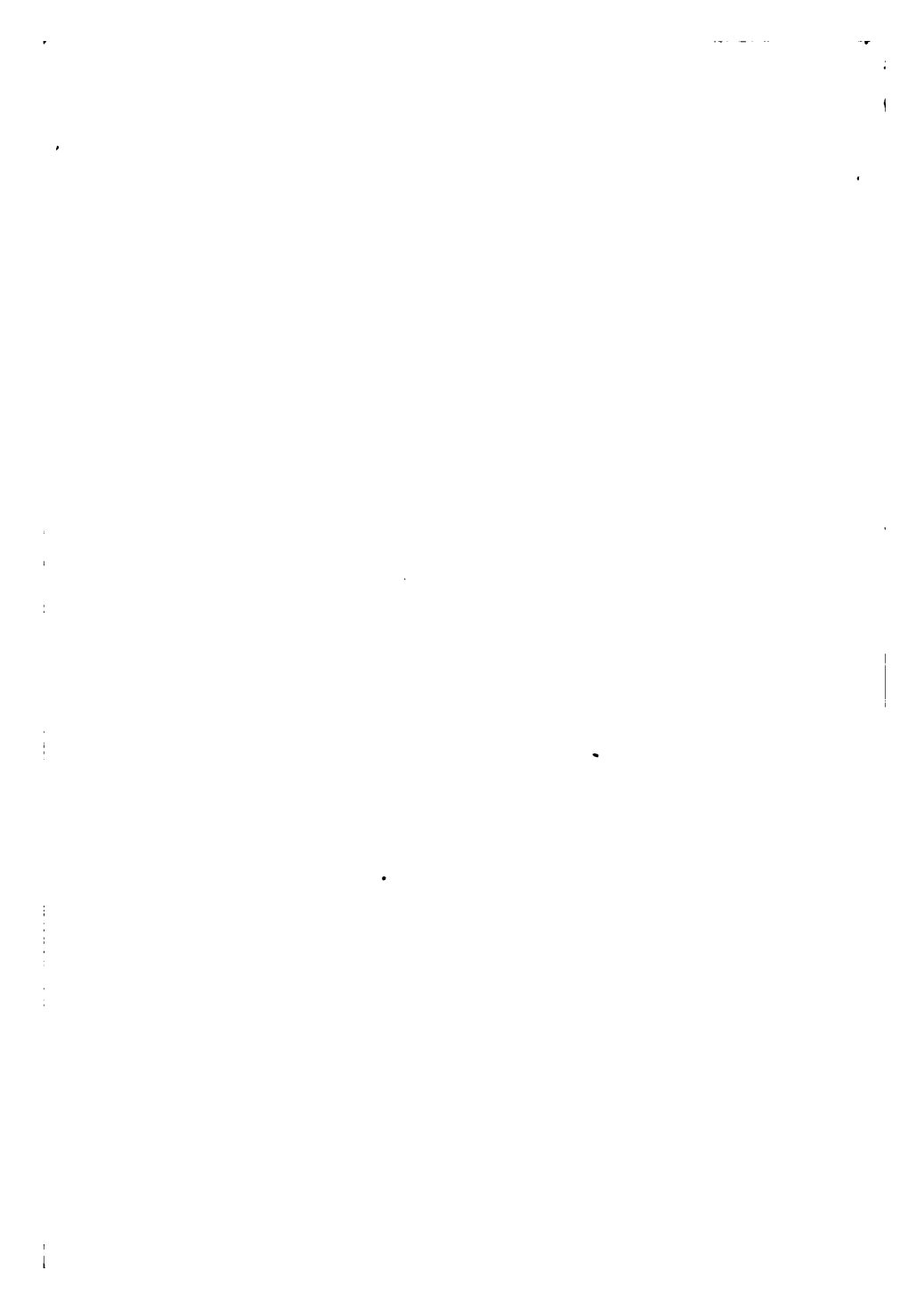


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**THE WINGLESS VICTORY**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

**WIDDICOMBE : A Novel**



# THE WINGLESS VICTORY

BY  
M. P. WILLCOCKS

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMVII

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**“ La femme est une gloire et peut-être une honte  
Pour l'ouvrier divin et suspect qui la fit.  
A tout le bien, à tout le mal, elle suffit.  
Haine, amour, fange, esprit, fièvre, elle participe  
Du gouffre, et la matière aveugle est son principe.”**  
(“ La Femme,” VICTOR HUGO.)

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# THE WINGLESS VICTORY

## CHAPTER I

### CLOVER HONEY AND GULL'S WING

THE black cliffs of Bossiney Cove threw solid shadows on the sand, but above the chasm the blaze of westerling light glistened on the bleached heads of sea-thrift. To left and right headland rose beyond headland, from Trevose on the west to the great shutter of Hennacliff on the east. Beyond these more headlands were but shadows in the blue-grey of distance, each bearing jewelled names as full of the bygone zest of life, which is romance, as is Pentelicus itself. For this was the magic coast of the far west, and the nearest cape merged in the buttresses of Tintagel. All things shimmered in the heat-haze as if the air were full of the breath of a great fire, and along the coast in the stillness the ear caught the rhythm of the Atlantic rollers breaking on the ledges of slate. The sea, curving like a bow, was but a mirage, with cloud-cast shadows of deeper blue flecking its surface ominously; for the spaces of sea and sky, with the rock bastions guarding the sun-tanned cliffs, were but waiting for the shivering whimper of distant storm.

On the road that winds upward from the cove there appeared the figures of two women, their skirts whistling through the sea-thrift as they passed. The sun caught the sparkle of a buckle at the waist of the younger woman and flashed on the red of her sunshade—finding, too, a moment's

## 2            The Wingless Victory

harbourage in the depths of her hair, which, black as it was indoors, in the light gleamed brown in its depths like the fur of a black beast.

Wilmot Borlace was a tiny woman, somewhat like a wild strawberry, for she had the knack of gathering but the daintiest perfection from food and air. The waves of dark hair half hid her blue-veined forehead, above the storm-cloud eyes that, on a close analysis, showed grey-brown at the surface, filmy grey within, black in the depths. Tiny wrists, tiny neck, with an ivory skin that darkened into brown shadows with weariness or pain: it is a type that some call Spanish in the far west, but is probably of much older ancestry in the land.

The quivering restlessness of Wilmot's manner was accentuated by the oak-like build of Tryphena White, the Amazon of the farm kitchen, by whose side she walked. A muscular woman was Tryphena, with fierce beady eyes and blue-black hair that whitened into a ring round the temples, like a human rook.

They stood for a moment looking down at the cove from which they had just come. In the surf the sun gleamed on the bare limbs of racing boys, who, mad with the sting of the sea-wind and their own dancing pulses, tossed a ball from hand to hand. One splendid lad stood for a second outlined against the sky on the sun-warmed surface of a rock. The left button on the shoulder of his bathing-suit had burst, and the heave of his flat, boyish breast could be seen from above: in the panting heart-beats that shook his lithe flanks the glory of old marble lived again. Then with a shout he plunged; the momentary sense of lissom power was over, and the lads became, at the feet of the weed-hung Elephant rock, but human may-flies once more.

"Rapsallions," said Tryphena, turning away in an

## Clover Honey and Gull's Wing 3

ardour of propriety, "and not so much as a shift between the most of 'em."

Then, as they turned inland across the cliff-fields, she resumed the subject of her previous conversation—Wilmot's marriage, now three months accomplished, but still a subject of wonder in Bossiney, where wonders live far longer than nine days.

"What comes over me," said Tryphena, "is that a maid like you should ha' been found to commit matrimony with 'en. Whiskers and that, like a day-cat that's been after cream, and you not such a bad-looking maid after all, when you don't dress up a proper old fright."

"But," protested Mrs. Borlace, "he shaved off the whiskers before he proposed."

"It isn't so much," answered Tryphena, dogmatically, "what a man is that matters; it's the way you happen to see 'em. Now, I never think of Dr. Borlace but what I see whiskers, though there mayn't be none to his face at the minute. But there, 'twas written down above against your name, Dr. Anthony Borlace, and no maid can go against that."

As the two paused for a moment to enable Tryphena to readjust the market-basket on her hip, it could be seen that the faces of both, notwithstanding the differences due to class and education, bore a similar expression, for both wore the look of struggle. Struggle or acquiescence in the sullen flow of things: it is the bed-rock difference in faces, not snub nose or aquiline, rosy lips or pale.

In these two, though the one recognized only the material evils of cold, hunger, dirt, and nakedness, and the other usually lived in that pursuit of inward joys which so seldom leads joywards, the sense of struggle produced a look of kinship that was unmistakable.

Wilmot Quick, now Wilmot Borlace, as a child had left her mother's house at Bossiney to live with her uncle at

## 4           The Wingless Victory

Challacombe, on the South Devon coast, only returning to Bossiney for occasional holidays. Here she had met Dr. Borlace, who, though his practice lay in Challacombe, was well known in Bossiney, where he had more than once acted as *locum tenens*. He was therefore liable to the free-spoken criticism of Tryphena, housekeeper and general factotum at the farm of St. Piran's, situated on the coast road that runs through Bossiney, within half a mile of Mrs. Quick's house.

The grassy track they were following finished at a stile, on the other side of which a small square of oats had been recently cut. On such a slope, ending as it did in sheer cliff, scythe labour was, of course, the only possible method. The two women stood for a moment watching the man who had been at work on the field. Just at this moment he presented a picture that arrested the attention. With his long neck, open at the throat and collarless, tilted back, he stood pressing a small cider keg to his lips. Wilmot laughed, for there was something in the working muscles and the rapt attitude that suggested the joyful quiver of a lamb's tail at the delights of warm milk, or of a drone wagging with the narcotic delight of clover honey. The world seemed just then no oyster to be opened by the sword of youth, but a beaker of delights to be drained of its sweets.

"Slips down as sweet as new milk," chuckled Tryphena; "that's Archelaus Rouncevell all over. Look to the lips of 'en—suck, suck, they go."

The sound of her words reached the young man even in his absorption. The keg came down from his face, and he flushed scarlet as he stepped forward. It was Tryphena's young master or nursling, for both names were applicable. The small farm at St. Piran's was owned by Archelaus's mother, who had been for years a widow, and under the thumb of her servant Tryphena. The Rouncevells were

## Clover Honey and Gull's Wing 5

well-to-do, considering the cheapness of country life and the fact that Mrs. Rouncevell, owning an inland farm which was well let, had but one son to support. St. Piran's itself consisted of many acres of cliff pasturage for sheep and a few fields of arable land.

"Archelaus," said Mrs. Borlace, taking pleasure in the rustle of her one silk skirt as she climbed the stile, "Archelaus, Tony is coming next week to take me back with him to Challacombe, so you won't have my company much longer. Make the most of me and come to tea with me to-day in the Rocky Valley. I've had the things taken there, but I'm afraid there is no cider."

Wilmot's eyes flashed watchfully at his, but she read there very little, and more pleasure was to be derived from Tryphena's grunt of disapproval. In Tryphena's opinion the two were much too free with one another.

"Not next week!" he said blankly.

"Next week," said Wilmot. "So you'll come. I'll give you three-quarters of an hour to get ready. You'll find me by the smoke of my fire."

"Right," said Archelaus, opening the gate into the road for them.

He stood watching the two for a second with a curious expression for the face of a young Englishman placed in circumstances that demanded no special effort. For, although Archelaus could not have been much more than one and twenty, there was gathering over his features the film of doubt and distrust that usually forms on the faces of much older men. In the twenties, a handsome man with brains feels this to be the best of all possible worlds: the cream of things may be his—women, in an England full of them, to be had for the nod; careers, on the well-trodden professional roads, for a minimum of exertion: in short, he is a young prince, with his head full of dreams. In the thirties

## 6 The Wingless Victory

he has discovered that this is a world of strange rebuffs, the worst of which may come from success reacting on temperament: in other words, he is an optimist resigned to the second-best. Young as he was, the film was already spreading over Archelaus Rouncevell's face, gathering, as such films must, from within, where the kingdom of self-knowledge lies.

Meanwhile Tryphena raged inwardly, and prepared for a reproof of Wilmot Borlace, for, like many country women, she loved talk that touches the quick of things.

"Be her man what he may," said Tryphena, firmly, "whiskers or no, he's what a wedded wife should stick to."

"Well," said Wilmot, "I don't see what it has to do with you, but my wedded man's coming in a few days to fetch me home."

"I've known 'ee," said Tryphena, "since you was cradle-high, and I'm minded to let 'ee hear what I think upon two, three things."

"Ah," said Wilmot, "I'm waiting for your remarks. Though I don't see why I shouldn't let Tony stay alone for a few days now and then. He's busy, and I'm idle. Challacombe wanted him, it didn't want me, that's all."

Mrs. Borlace had been left at Bossiney for an extra week after her husband's holiday there had come to an end.

"A woman," said Tryphena, proudly enunciating an axiom, "shouldn't so much as lift her eyes to a man, except when he's her own."

"Not even when he's proposing?" asked Wilmot, flippantly.

"Least of all then, for fear her shouldn't see plain when 'tis most needed. But you've looked once too often, and now, since it's 'till death do us part' with you and the doctor, you ought to leave Mr. Archelaus alone. But here you be, trapesing about the parish with 'en, for all the world like a pedlar and his Joe, picnicing, painting, boating, and

## Clover Honey and Gull's Wing 7

the doctor down to Challacombe to his work. And you but a three months' wedded wife, that ought to be cutting up flannel against what may be coming."

Two points of red flashed in Wilmot's pale face. She was furious, but Tryphena gave her no time to speak.

"And," she went on imperturbably, "you might so well try to hatch a chick out of a china nest-egg, as get sense out of a Rouncevell. There's missus, that hasn't got sense enough to fetch a jug when the cider's dropping, with a lad to rear. How her ever compassed a lad at all beats me."

"And pray what have I to do with the interesting Rouncevell household?" asked Wilmot, nose in air.

"Naught, by rights," said Tryphena, firmly, "but a deal, by wrongs. For you're turning Archelaus's head shameful. And he but a lad and you a missus, and not so very far off thirty."

"Tryphena," gasped Wilmot, whirling her sunshade.

But the cannonade of words from the rear continued. "That Archelaus has been born wrong, and reared wrong. And now you must put your spoke in to spoil the lad. 'Give not thy strength unto woman,' saith Mrs. Rouncevell to Archelaus over and over again, 'for many strong men have been slain by her,' saith she. And, by the Lord, for all missus is a poor tool, it's a true thing that her saith."

"You wretched old woman, how dare you talk like this to me?" said Wilmot.

"Bless 'ee, my dear," said Tryphena, "'tis but my way. I always did like a saying you could slick your lips upon. 'Tis but a manner o' speaking."

"A most objectionable manner, then," said Wilmot.

"And as for the men," said Tryphena, proceeding to deal with the other half of creation, "what the Almighty made 'em for is more than I can say. Harder to bear, more trouble to rear than maids, they worrit you to death till they'm

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married, and when they'm married they die off young and leave 'ee with ten chillern to support. And 'tis the same all through: a cock pheasant's tougher than the hen, for all his feathers, and you've to be grateful to a bull if he don't gore you."

"They amuse one, you know, Tryphena," laughed Wilmot.

"They do, when you've to climb hedges to get clear of 'em."

"I meant men, as you knew very well."

"Men may you. They don't me. One come after me once, and sot and sot and stared till I could ha' yelled. But I found a way. I always scrubbed the floor when he come till he sat upon an island of dry. Then he'd sit with his hat on, for the poor souls think they'm warm and dry if their hats be on, till I come to scrub the very island he sat upon. That did for 'en. They'm no use at all, except for a pig-killing and that." Her mind was turned in a fortunate direction. "And I've got every bit of that pig bespoke, except one cheek," she chuckled.

Was woman ever really angry at being called a fascinating lure? Wilmot laughed gaily as they descended the hill to the Rocky Valley.

"But the pig isn't killed yet, is he?" she asked.

"I never have 'em killed," said Tryphena, firmly, "till I know where every bit of 'em's to go. But I don't have much trouble, for folks know how I feed the Rouncevell pigs."

Little did that St. Piran's pig reck of the way his members were, by anticipation, scattered over the country, while he delivered himself up to the succulent delights of scald milk and potato-parings.

Across the road at the bridge that spans the Rocky Valley, where Wilmot was to part from her mentor, there lay a drift of dusky yellow elm-leaves, for the autumn comes early on this wind-tossed coast. Red-gold against the blue



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of the sky, a falling leaf or two fluttered for a moment and faded ; it was the god of the air dropping in visible showers to bless the earth—origin, perhaps, of the myth of Jupiter and Danaë. As this thought flashed across Wilmot, she felt herself mentally and physically quivering with a vivid life that matched the splendour of colour all round her.

A gull flying seaward croaked hoarsely, as he passed so close that the straining tension of the wings was visible. The fierceness of its eyes, that seem to have looked the cosmic forces in the face since creation's dawn, was reflected somehow in Wilmot's face. She, too, was awake, even cruelly so.

"I never can abide to hear them birds scritch," said Tryphena, as they parted ; "it do make the goosey-flesh come up like stubble upon my back, same as putting my feet in hot water."

In these parts the gulls contest the sovereignty of the air with the rarer inland birds, so that it is not an unusual sight to see a whole flock of sea-birds following the plough.

Like the birds that are now giving up the wastes of untilled sea for the fat furrows, Wilmot, since her marriage, had been half tamed in the domestic, firelit atmosphere. To-day she was again the creature of instinct, with a fierce zest in the primæval power over the hunted thing : to the bird, fish ; to the woman, man ; to both, a world that exists but to be drained of its delights.

Lighting her fire on a ledge, she laughed at the vision of the cider-keg, for it exactly expressed her own mood. She crooned a wordless song to herself as she stooped to fill her kettle at the stream. Above her the sun turned the leafage of the wild cherry red-brown with the fire of death within, and deeper down the valley flashed the pomegranate of the hawthorn berries. At the mouth of the valley sea and sky merged into infinite distance.

## CHAPTER II

### MOON-RISE

"INCENSE to the wood-gods," said Archelaus Rouncevell, flinging a handful of fir-cones on the crackling fire of boughs and gorse. As he stooped to blow on the embers of it the grey ash rose in clouds, and he noticed how the fragments were feathered like frost crystals. The smoke hurt his eyes, but the spirit of the wood came out in the scent of it, aromatic, breathing of summer, of spring winds and the great woodland heart.

The fire had been lit on a ledge overlooking the valley, and the note of a cock-pheasant in the wood below jarred against the rolling undertone of the pebbles on the beach as they shifted up and down. The blaze burnt, now violet, now red, pulsating with the lad's breath like the visible spirit of life. The glow of it deepened the eye-sockets and sharpened the contours of his face, as firelight, like hunger, always does. But it could not hide the dreamer's high forehead, the eyes that glanced with a lizard-like length and quickness of gaze, or the tenderly shaven lips that often trembled, even now, with his seven-year-old smile. Had there been any lines to smooth away from his face, the firelight would have done so, after its kindly wont, but there were none. The long, pointed artist fingers matched the oval of his face, that had too little of length for melancholy and too little of breadth for fighting strength.

Wilmot, lying close against the slate from which the ledge jutted, watched him keenly as he resumed the occupation which he had interrupted in order to mend the fire. It

was much later in the evening, and at the head of the valley a pallor was beginning to gleam from the horizon, whence widespread clouds with pearly light behind them threw a lustre down the narrow combe.

The moon would soon be up, and in the pearly light the larches shone yellow against the Scotch firs that cut the skyline. Scattered tea-things showed how the interval had been occupied by the pair, and the warmth of the fire was grateful in the cool night. Archelaus was reading aloud, from the book of splendid youth, of the divine folly that would storm the battlements of life ere the days lengthen into weariness.

"Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;  
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter."

All the power of Kit Marlowe's lines rolled out in his voice, that now and then broke from a man's steady baritone to a boy's flute note. One guessed, from the ring of it, how, for a second or two, Archelaus was Marlowe over again—the poet who gathers up in a line the poignant sting of a passion.

"Shut the book," said Wilmot, from her corner, where the smell of crushed thyme mingled with that of the burning pine cones. "Put it away this minute. It's—it's—unwholesome."

The boy laughed, and his eyes flashed into hers like living agates; but he obeyed, and flung the Great Elizabethan against a thyme knot. Wilmot's mind cast about for something practical, for the agate eyes were disturbing.

"How is the work getting on?" she asked in sagest tones.

Archelaus had spent some months in a Newlyn studio; it was almost the only practical teaching he had ever received, and even that had been cut short by Mrs. Rouncevell's fears.

His face darkened. "Paint," he said savagely; "I haven't done a stroke for weeks. I knew before how hard it was to put down what you saw of all this." He waved his

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hand up the combe and down. "And the more you see the less you get down. But that's nothing to the other world."

"What do you mean?"

"The world inside you. It's like walking on the sea: you can do it, if you don't think. But suddenly you look down. You're lost then, for the weeds wave beneath you and the sands shift. It isn't solid any more. You've looked into your own self, and that's worse than valleys and hills—outside you. No, I don't think I shall ever paint again."

The sense of final renunciation, which is one of youth's most delightful melancholies, overwhelmed him.

"You ought not to be brooding over 'rendering' this or that. Oh, if I only were a man, with a man's chances. And here you are wasting the years that mean so much. Let me tell you something about myself."

"Tell me," he said, drawing nearer and catching her hand.

"You see," she said, "I was brought up at Challacombe mostly by Uncle Dickie. He taught me, in some ways, like a boy. He made me learn that I wasn't anything unless I paid back by some sort of work for all the food and warmth and thought that had been spent for me. Not to him, you know, but to the world. Dear old Dickie wouldn't have grudged me the very dearest thing he owned. But he made me reckon up my debts."

"I know," said Archelaus; "I've thought of that too. But how?"

"How? In fifty ways, if one is a man. But listen again. That's what I was taught, and then it all stopped; I was just a girl, and it seemed I couldn't repay. It was all very well for Uncle Dickie to talk so. He is a boat-builder who sees that his boats are honestly made. He likes to think that they will hold men's lives in the hollow of them."

"Yes, that's fine," said Archelaus, gazing into the fire.

"So it is," said Wilmot, bitterly; "but, you see, I

couldn't build boats, and William, that's uncle's servant, boils potatoes better than I. There was only one thing for me to do ; so I—married, when I got the chance. You see, every woman, as well as every man, must have a leverage, a chance of a career. That's woman's lever—marriage."

"But——" said Archelaus, patting the hand he had caught.

"Oh yes, it's full of 'but.' There are women who can live alone and make their way, only too often over their own hearts. I wasn't one. But we didn't want to talk of me ; it was of you we began."

"I'm tied here ; mother wants me to hang about at her apron-strings," he said. "She hates my painting ; she has put every obstacle in the way of it, only because it was my father's trade. She wants me to muddle on at St. Piran's under her eye."

"Then go. There's nothing else for it. Go out into the world and learn what the world's like. Let the seaweeds sway and the sands shift inside you. Drive your boat above them. Go away from St. Piran's."

"And leave you ? Ah, I cannot."

"Why, you foolish fellow, I'm going myself next week. And, after all, what can you and I be to each other, save very good friends ? Archelaus, don't make me regret I made a friend of you."

"I'll try not to," he said in a choked voice.

"Your mother was wrong not to let you have a profession, but you can't always be looking backwards. Go away and fight for your own hand, and bear in mind my envy that you carry with you."

"I've never seen anything of the world, except out in Canada, where I went to some of mother's people for a year. Somehow this fire brings back Canada to me. It must have been the wood ash that looked like a snow-flurry," he said.

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Then he began to talk of Canadian winters, of the snow-storms that blind the eyes, and from which one can only escape by trusting to the dogs, of the red men and their stealthy footsteps. As he spoke his face seemed to sink into the passivity of an Indian brave. One could see the facile artist temper by the way he flung himself into the new thought.

Dreamy talk it was, bringing back the life far from conventions, with only the instincts of the wilderness for guide. Wilmot lay quite still as he talked, feeling against her body the swelling curves of the great earth-frame. The wind that stirred the dwarf thorn bushes above them felt like a great hand laid on the head of a sleeping child. Thought faded in her as the scent of the thyme grew stronger in her nostrils; the fervour of zeal in which she had spoken died down.

Then she suddenly awoke to find herself alone. She lay thinking over Archelaus and his handicapped condition, of how he might fight a way out, not without a wrench of parting from Mrs. Rouncevell. The boy had few acquaintances, it seemed, and no friends. It was Dr. Borlace who had first tried to get into touch with the lad.

She turned over to lean on her elbows and fling pieces of lichen into the blaze, that the fire might turn the tendrils into fiery snakes. Her pale face looked impish in the glow as she laughed to herself: she was thinking of the look in the boy's eyes. Yes, it was mad and bad . . . and lovely.

Suddenly the brake stirred above her, the dried bracken shivered, and a fear came with the wind. She raised herself with a start, leaning on her hand to glance fearfully into the valley and over her shoulder. Out of the darkness it seemed that something moved, something monstrous, yet attracted by herself. The earth she lay against had become terrible, the creeping things, and the dreadful human legacy within, stirred. The earth and sea were at once alien to the life

within herself; the wind was impersonal, and therefore terrible, for she came from the land where the lads still leap the fires to keep off the demons of ill-luck, and fatalism was her inheritance.

The nature within her seemed to cry out for its kin, and it was an unspeakable relief to rise and fling herself against Archelaus as he sprang on to the ledge, throwing down his armful of driftwood in order to catch her. They stood in silence for a moment, holding each other like two children, cheek pressed to cheek.

Ah! that was better, this life that beat against hers was kin to the blood in her own veins, to the surge of life at her heart. She lay still in his arms with the comfort a child feels in coming back to homeliness after strange terror.

The pallor of the sky behind them turned to pearliness, the pearliness to white radiance. Even under the shy touch of his lips she felt the whiteness of the moon-glow like the gleam of a god's throne. She watched it from his arm till it seemed a terrible witness.

Then she awoke. .

"Oh," she cried, pushing him away, "let me go, please."

At her words the man in him awoke exultantly: after all, he was the stronger even if it were only by force of muscle and body. The world was a good world, since it gave the delights of strength to this man.

"No, no," he said; "it was divine that you should come to me like that."

"It was idiotic. I was asleep, and then I suddenly awoke—and you came. Let me go. Just think."

"I won't think," he said, "not now. Not about anything that's past. That's all like a play that's played and the curtain down. We've got now."

The echo of his words moved her against her will, but she fought for the mastery over herself and him. Then the

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old Mother sent help, or so it seemed to Wilmot's tense nerves, though by the agony of a meaner child: the shrill scream of a rabbit caught in a trap in the wood below called up to them for help. The beating, agonized heart spoke twice.

"Go," she said, "put it out of its pain. Don't let it cry again. Go and kill it quickly."

They both possessed that gift which adds immeasurably to the pain of life—the sense of animal suffering.

The cry came again.

"Please, Archelaus."

"You will wait for me here," he said.

She nodded her assent.

"Throw fresh gorse on the fire, heart's delight, that I may know where to find you," he said.

He stood for a second watching her with dancing eyes that she could not meet with her own. Then he dropped from the ledge and disappeared among the trees.

It took him a long time to find the trap and put the creature out of its pain. When he returned to the fire Wilmot had disappeared. It was with a sense of half relief that he found her gone, and set himself to the task of extinguishing the fire he had kindled. One thick branch defied him, for the fire had worked its way so far into the heart that it seemed impossible to stamp out the sparks. Savagely Archelaus set his foot on the end of the branch, determined to break it in pieces till every sign of fire was gone. The snaky length of it twisted flaming before him, till at last nothing but a black patch and a few charred branches showed where their fire had been.

But Wilmot had not returned home, as Archelaus supposed. Creeping along the side of the hill, she made her way to a cranny in the rock that jutted out like the fin of a sea-monster into the water. Here she disturbed a row of puffins that had been preparing for roost in a long white



line. They rose at her approach with a strident cry that startled her with the fear that it might betray her whereabouts to Archelaus. Here, crouched in the shadow of the overhanging rocks, she tried to master her agitation.

Archelaus Rouncevell was the victim of a dead father, a living mother, and an income. His father was, perhaps, the smallest part of his evil inheritance, for he had merely left him a temperament that fastened itself, limpet-like, to the delights of life. Archelaus Rouncevell, senior, appeared one summer on the north coast, with a sketching apparatus, leaving behind him in the south a mass of unpaid bills and a bad reputation. That summer he lodged at St. Piran's, and ended by marrying the owner of it, never concealing from any one the fact that the small income, not the woman, had been the attraction. He endured this life till a year after the boy's birth, and then departed, "For Australia, not the Better Land," as Mrs. Rouncevell put it. She knew it to be Australia, for letters addressed from up-country stations came from time to time asking for money; and soon after these had ceased, there came a letter from a stranger announcing his death.

Mrs. Rouncevell's attitude towards the world was one of fear at its brutality, but even her fear was not thoroughgoing, and this was curiously shown in the training of her child. Desiring to make him gentle, as his father had been rough and cruel, she longed even to forbid him meat-eating: instead, she tried, for a long time, to keep him ignorant that the sirloin came from a once living animal, though she gave him beef because she feared to weaken him by withholding it. Mrs. Rouncevell's mind, indeed, was made up of odds and ends of strange resolutions that contradicted one another. "Pig-wash" her husband had called her in one of those bitter epithets that sprang so often from him, as flame from a banked-up fire. Now the essence of "pig-wash" is the scrappy nature of its construction.

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In one thing only had Mrs. Rouncevell been consistent : she had isolated her boy and taught him especially to shun women, driven to this thoroughness, poor soul, by the misery of experience. He had never been to a public school, and had known nothing of the burning sun and buffeting wind of reality.

Then, denied companionship, the boy took to books, and the books led him to a world entirely outside Mrs. Rouncevell's vision—a terrible world, too, it seemed to this woman, who had come to see, in the bitterness of her life, all natural impulses in the light of the great "Thou shalt not." The pagan world into which her son's mind sprang so gladly was to Mrs. Rouncevell a sort of Devil's Acre.

All this might have mattered little, if the boy had only been obliged to earn his bread. But here came in the crowning misfortune : Mrs. Rouncevell's income was that terrible incubus—one large enough for beef and bread, but not big enough to foster anything but the kitchen and pantry view of life.

His scholarship was typical of his training, for before Archelaus could construe correctly a page of Virgil, he had fallen under the glamour of Theocritus. Just now he had met another glamour, one of which he had heard much from his mother, but only in the terrible Hebrew imagery of the evil woman that lies in wait to snare the feet of youth. As he fought with the charred bough, he tried to forget the thought that stabbed him through and through, a sense of the lightness of an adored woman. The sweat-drops trickled into his eyes as he struggled.

Meanwhile, Wilmot, watching the tide recede till the yellow ridges of high-water mark showed above the weed, fought the longing that has more to do with women's folly than any other emotion, the longing to know herself, just for once, among the world's lovely things—the dawn, the

spring, the scent of violets. To be more longed for by a man than the daylight by a watcher ; this desire it was that she felt, not passion, still less love. Both of these are rarer than we think. At any rate, she had felt neither, though she had been for three months Dr. Borlace's wife.

So long had she been considered the strange changeling in her mother's family, that when her first offer of marriage came she accepted it, with a sense of joyful experiment as her most lively sensation. But by now the experiment was neither joyful nor lively.

"Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

The voice rang out again in her fancy ; it was not in this way that Dr. Borlace had talked, and yet it was this tone that a woman's heart would go on missing till the very end. This, too, she might have conquered, but for Eve's inheritance. Since the days of Eden, when the woman first had the boldness to experiment with the tree of life, it has always been the woman who loves experiment in emotion, and of danger knows only the thrill, not the fear. Woman's usual disinclination to risk decisive action deserts her entirely in her love affairs ; a woman to whom consols appear a hazardous investment will cheerfully risk marriage with a selfish spendthrift or an icy egotist. Inherited instinct, doubtless, else had the race ceased long ago ; burnt over and over again at the fire of life, woman still plays with it as she did in the days of the cave-dweller.

So still sat Wilmot that a puffin took her for a rock, and with the cry he uttered on discovering his mistake startled her into going home. At the moment that puffin was more nerve-shaking than Archelaus, for it is chiefly the external that is startling to a woman. The depths within she faces calmly enough, for, indeed, they make up the sphere of her normal activity.

## CHAPTER III

### HUNGER TOWER

"A HUSBAND'S nothing more than a dear luxury," said Mrs. Quick, firmly. "I've always said so, and I always shall. Mine had a broad back, that came handy to warm my hands against of a cold winter's night, but even for that a hot-water bottle's cheaper, especially if you have to keep the kitchen fire alight constantly."

Wilmot and her mother were calling at St. Piran's, hence these remarks, which were addressed to Mrs. Rouncevell as calculated to be consoling to her in her widowed state, for although Mrs. Rouncevell had been long a widow, Mrs. Quick still considered her in need of comfort. For, indeed, Mrs. Quick possessed no mental background, and past and present became merged in one in her mind. The past was sometimes forgotten, but when remembered stood side by side with to-day. A merry face, framed in ripples of very white hair, was the smallest of her charms; the lavender-scented embrace of her was the greatest. Let her but clasp you once in a bear-like hug and you would forgive her all the boredom you had endured at her hands, for the faintly suggested purity of person and dress was redolent of summer winds across a lavender hedge. The people whom, for reasons of propriety, she hugged not knew little of her charm, save, perhaps, her inspired cookery. She could make egg *à la coque* divine by the way in which she stirred in the pepper and salt—or so it seemed if you sat as a tiny child on her knee to eat that egg. On a sunny lawn, with

children tumbling at her feet, Mrs. Quick showed the bliss of a mother hen.

"And yet," said Mrs. Rouncevell, "you have married all your three girls."

"Oh," said Wilmot, "mother may lay down the law, but she's the last to follow it herself."

"Wilmot's getting married was none of my doing, Mrs. Rouncevell; and it's my belief, too, that my brother Richard never superintended her engagement as I should have done. Not as I did when Venny and Benny were being courted."

Venny and Benny, otherwise Advena and Bien-Venue, Mrs. Quick's eldest daughters, had received their cheerful names when the late Mr. Quick was rejoicing at the appearance of his olive-branches. On the arrival of a third daughter he gave up welcoming names in disgust, and fell back on Wilmot, a Quick name for generations.

"Why, when Venny and Benny both had young men," continued Mrs. Quick, "I kept my head through it all, and, thanks to having two sitting-rooms, we came nicely out of it, and with the blackberry juice running out of the jelly bag in the kitchen at the critical moment, too. For I kept Venny and her young man in the little room just inside the front door, and I had Benny and hers shut up in the dining-room, and I just ran to and fro with my knitting, so that the young men never thought anything of it. And both marriages turned out beyond everything."

"And the jelly?" inquired Mrs. Rouncevell, politely.

"Came out perfect, clear and firm, you could cut it with a knife, and all the blackberry flavour it ought to have. And I've nothing to say against either of the young men, though Venny's husband does spoil their boy. He ate a pot of my best raspberry the last time they were in the house, and neither of them said a word. And Benny's had twins

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twice, which must be wearing to the constitution, though, of course, you can't go against what's laid down above."

"But I'm sure you're as pleased as can be," said Mrs. Rouncevell, "with Dr. Borlace, for all you didn't arrange the marriage yourself. I never saw a man I liked better than the doctor."

"Well," said Mrs. Quick, doubtfully, "I've never been sure how it was going to turn out after I saw how the skin crumpled at the back of his neck, for Wilmot's so pernickety about things like that; so unlike Venny and Benny, who never cared to notice trifles of that sort in the right kind of man."

Mrs. Rouncevell watched Wilmot, who sat in the light of the peat fire which glowed on the oak panelling of the splendid old living-room at St. Piran's. Her dress of dull black, with an open slit at the neck, through which shone the ivory skin, the flaming cheeks that the fire had caught: Mrs. Rouncevell missed nothing of it.

She was so absorbed, indeed, that, forgetting the low wooden bar across the doorway—though she had been accustomed to it for half a century—she dragged her foot against it and almost fell as she went out of the room to summon Tryphena with the tea. This lapse of mind was characteristic of Mrs. Rouncevell, who had even, in her perturbation at the arrival of visitors, buttoned her bodice wrongly all the way up. The tea-tray having been brought in, Tryphena banged the door behind her loudly and betook herself to the garden.

"I'd dearly like to know what they're saying," said Tryphena to herself, "so I'm safer weeding."

Accordingly she weeded.

Mrs. Rouncevell, who dreaded even the amount of irrevocableness implied in committing an ordinary letter to the post, was going to risk an appeal for help to another

woman, to throw the dice, once and for all, for the safety of Archelaus. With dry lips, whose trembling she tried in vain to control, she sank down by the tea-table, her flat-chested body quivering with restlessness, her grey face glistening with the dampness of fear.

"Archelaus is away to-day at Bottreaux. If only he'd been a girl," she said. "A girl would have been so much easier to manage. I envy you, Mrs. Quick, having only girls."

The three women glanced at the far corner of the stone-tiled room, towards the part called Archelaus's corner, where his desk and easel stood.

"You escape the trouble of looking round for husbands, and men so scarce, too," said Mrs. Quick. "I can't tell what becomes of 'em. We'd never any difficulty in finding men in my young days. And me left with three."

Wilmot thought it a lucky escape for Archelaus that he thus missed being turned into a drab Faint-heart, for, with the scorn of an adventurous nature, she had scant sympathy for futile existences. Mrs. Rouncevell paid no heed.

"I've had nothing but trouble in my boy," she said. "I once heard an old woman say, 'Every new child a woman gets is like a new patent medicine : she always thinks it will do something wonderful for her, and it never does.' And it's true. Before Archelaus was born, I thought it would be heaven to see him crawl at my feet ; but when he was there, I couldn't think of anything but his chances of croup. And when he got beyond croup, I thought of scarlet fever. And so it's been all along, I've always been going to be safe and happy with him—next time. And that time has never come."

"I should say you want to take a tonic regularly," said Mrs. Quick ; "you're bloodless. I said when I saw you first, 'Bloodless,' I said. And I'm seldom wrong. It was

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'bloodless' that jumped to my lips, and so I said to Venny. You ask her if that wasn't exactly the expression I used."

"I should try to think of something else," said Wilmot, knowing Mrs. Rouncevell's words were aimed at her. "He's a splendid fellow, and will do well enough if you leave him alone."

"With a little purifying medicine in the spring," said Mrs. Quick, who would have ministered to any number of diseased minds with Turkey rhubarb.

"What else have I in the world but my son," said Mrs. Rouncevell, omitting Mrs. Quick, as most people did unless the talk were of store-cupboards.

"Oh," cried Wilmot, in her gay, clear tones that cut Mrs. Quick like a lash, "children, husbands, must we women all lay our eggs in those old worn-out baskets? If you pin your happiness on a man's whims, then you'll have your ups and downs, but you'll never know satisfaction for one solid hour."

"Every good woman wants to be first in some one's heart," said Mrs. Rouncevell.

"Then I'll not be a good woman, for let your skin get wrinkled and your eyes tired, and you'll be a good deal less than first in any man's heart."

The conversation was getting rather beyond Mrs. Quick, but she made a gallant attempt to catch up.

"Keep the stomach in good order and the skin'll take care of itself." It was an axiom on which she prided herself.

But Mrs. Rouncevell paid no heed. She was going over and over again, as always, the one drama of her life, as women must who have no hold on life save through the emotions. For no tragedy that the world has ever seen can equal that of a starved creature, after years of baffled longing, with no sense of helpful work to console, falling



back into despairing silence. "The life, the life, shall that never be sweet?"

'Tis the woman's cry, and women like Mrs. Rouncevell can conceive but of one way to make it sweet—to be all in all to some one. The woman who misses it in her husband will seek it in her child, even to the very extremity of age, and the drab, ineffectual women know this best, far better than Helen of Troy. For a starveling knows the zest of meat and drink as no epicure ever can.

"When his father asked me to marry him," she said, "I thought heaven had opened. I couldn't believe it when he told me; but, after all, his will was but to my money. He never spared man nor woman in his will, and his will was evil."

It was Mrs. Rouncevell's one finished phrase: she had, indeed, spent a lifetime in framing it.

"And when I knew that, God sent the child. He was my own, I thought, though his father had never been. I never let him out of my sight. I taught him to be unlike his father. I knew where his father failed, and I thought I'd be beforehand."

The woman was speaking clearly, as she had seldom done before. Indeed, for this child, the shiftless body, who could never remember her orders for the grocer, whose household business was managed by Tryphena, had formed a scheme of life and kept to it, with the dogged persistence of one whose ideas are few.

"Her feet are on the pathway to hell;' I taught him that about woman, for his father's nature was in him. When Archelaus was coming I prayed his hair might be dark like mine, for there was never a dark Rouncevell yet. His father's hair was red as flame. And when they showed him to me, my prayer had been answered. I praised God to touch the little black down of him."

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Wilmot rose hurriedly and turned towards the fire. She saw a brave soul fighting unseen forces, with weapons caught from the armoury of ignorance. For the boy was not armed, but the weaker for this harping on the hidden lure of sinful charm. Ah, for the sun and wind of natural life, for the law of higher love, not the croaking of King Lemuel. For the moment pity wrung her heart. Then revolt came, for the splendid boy could not be chained to this purblind woman.

"But," she said, "if you've armed him, let him fight. Send him away where he'll meet the world. You cannot always keep him in leading-strings. And if he falls, he'll but walk the warier."

"Oh," said Mrs. Rouncevell, losing all control of herself, "he's too big for the nest. The books he reads, marked with the brand of sin! And I daren't burn them, for he'd go, if I did."

"And if I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times," said Mrs. Quick, "fetching up" once more; "there's nothing so bad for the eyes as muzzing over books. 'Muzz, muzz, muzz,' I've said to Wilmot, and you never get a young man by it either."

"Oh," said Wilmot, "I think you are needlessly frightened about him. You know, though you always expected it, he never did have croup. And perhaps he won't do any of the dreadful things you're afraid of. Anyway, he must live his life in his own way. He may even be a big man some day."

"And then I shall be dead."

"But you will have been the mother of a big man for all that. He's hungry to live. You must leave him alone, that's all."

At the moment she sympathized entirely with the boy whom this woman would have kept bound by the limits

of her own narrow horizon. Why should he lose an hour of that vivid time which comes but once in a man's life, when the pulses thrill to the wind's heart or the glance of a woman's eyes?

"Oh," whispered Mrs. Rouncevell, the bitter words flashing from her like a lightning-flash, "the question is whether you'll leave him alone or not; for my boy is on a slippery path, and your touch may send him over."

They were standing close together, while Mrs. Quick peered short-sightedly at the picture on the easel in the far corner of the room. Both women by the fire heard but the sap boiling in the logs and the angry pulses beating in their ears.

Suddenly Wilmot laughed, as she mentally compared her tired doctor, with his zeal for rows of sanitary little houses, and this splendid boy with the scent of divine youth about him. Then she recognized Mrs. Rouncevell's pitiful plight.

"I'm sorry you think that of me," she said gently. "It is not I who have been changing him; it is his manhood. For the little fellow you saw at your skirts is going—out of your life, as sons must. It is not I, but life, that's taking him."

She laid a hand on the poor flat breast that beat so painfully.

"Oh," said Mrs. Rouncevell, "I didn't mean it. But I'm beside myself. It's life and death to me, and I've said a hard thing to you."

In truth, she feared that she had worked mischief, rather than good, to her son. For clearly to formulate a fear is to bring fulfilment to the birth.

"Some day," she said, meekly holding up her visitor's coat—"some day, if you help me, you'll have the more happiness in your own children. You'll have better luck

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than I, when you watch them change, the little things you have handled so often. You won't be sorry for helping me when you come where I am."

"I will, I will be good," said Wilmot, pressing her fresh face against the faded one, that had known freshness only as a passing guest.

But as the distance lengthened between herself and St. Piran's, Wilmot felt the zest of adventurous living erase her sense of pity. The wind that buffeted her seemed to bring the fierce joy of playing with fire. For once in her life she "mattered"—she, who had so often felt the sense of her own meaningless existence. She, who could not write prescriptions or build ships, could at least be in at the making or marring of a man. To the woman who rises by a hair's breadth above the animal plane this knowledge is the perilous part of her charm, for life can bring glorious hours, when the fret of breathing existence is unfelt. They come most often in youth, when they spring from the great racial instincts; they come, too, in age, but then from conquest won by thought over these same instincts. Both hours, indeed, are dearly bought; only in youth the pain comes after the glory, and in age it is the forerunner of the joy.

So Mrs. Rouncevell had thrown the die and failed, as timidity must always fail.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ALTAR OF APHRODITE

AT the mouth of the tunnel that the waves have worn beneath the neck of stone leading to Tintagel Head, Archelaus and Wilmot paused for a moment. The strata dip towards the outlet, and entrance is gained by stooping low, almost to the ground, while the wind rushes through the chasm from the other side of the head with a breath as icy as the wind from fields of death, even when summer heat broods over the coast. Beyond the entrance the roof springs to an immense height, veined with curious pencilling and rust-stained by the springs from the headland. On the western entrance serpents of hissing green leapt over one another, writhing as they dashed the flakes of spume up to the roof of the cave.

The magic beach beside the headland, where the ninth wave, "full of voices," flung the child of destiny at the feet of Merlin, was a seething hell of tortured waves, rising in walls of translucent emerald at one moment, to fall the next amid the thunder of the rolling pebbles. Wilmot could feel the dank saltness of the air strike through her clothes, but the beat of wind and sea had dashed a fire into her eyes and cheeks; the sea had given her its wine to drink, and the black rocks might have been the stones of Latmos and she a Mænad.

It was impossible to speak, for the roar around them carried every other sound away, and now the waves threw at their feet a mass of weed and wreckage that churned

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hideously together. At the sight of it Archelaus caught her hand and drew her away to the entrance, for the outer world of madness was echoed by the turmoil of his mind, and he was afraid of himself with the special fear of those born within the sound of the sea-spray and the calling of the gulls.

Up the rocky pathway of the Knights they pushed their way and, for all the care he took to shelter her, the gusts came perilously near dashing them from the slippery steps. Once within the castle walls there was a lull, and they stood panting together. A stormy sun-flash made the corner warm for the moment.

"We shall never be able to stand on the Head itself," said Wilmot. "We must have been mad to come at all."

"Look," he answered, "our city is besieged."

Crouching down, she gazed at the sea below between two buttresses of masonry. Rays of green flickered across the grey surface, and the sun-gleams caught the golden lichen of the black rocks. All the wild coast glowed with sudden light, and as quickly flashed back again into darkness. Man, the sport of the winds without and of the yet wilder winds of the spirit within: this was what Archelaus saw, and the evidence of his senses heightened the storm of his mind.

"Wonderful, damnable!" he said. "You can't master it any way—not even paint it. And why is any one cursed with a sense of it who cannot put down a single gleam?"

It was the artist's cry as well as the lover's.

Wilmot crouched back in the shelter of the wall.

"What do they bring us into the world for," he said—"to fight and lose, and fight and lose?"

"You're tired to-day," said Wilmot, laying her hand on his neck.

The crisp feel of his hair was strange to her, after her

## The Altar of Aphrodite 31

own film of long hair. For a second the woman in her thrilled to the man in him, but only for a moment.

"Born of the will of man," he said, with fierce intensity, looking at the grass-blades; "how dare any one bring a man into the world—to suffer they know not what. That's the unpardonable sin. I'd rather cut off my right hand than have to do with such a crime."

"But some are happy, at least now and then."

"And that some may be happy now and then you gamble in human lives. For if one in a thousand gets a good time, the rest live for years in pain, or at best only freedom from pain."

"How do you know," said Wilmot, in a low voice, "but that the new souls clamour at the gates of life?"

"Why did you marry him?" he asked, suddenly turning over to look in her face. "Oh, I know, I shouldn't say it, but it's the house-sparrow and the seamew."

"I told you. I wanted to live."

"And so do I," he whispered, pulling her nearer. A strand of her hair fell across his face as he did so. He whitened to the lips, for he knew now why men gamble with life.

"Up there to-night at Bossiney," he went on hoarsely, "the men will leap the fire, when it burns down, for good luck. They always do it here when there's a bonfire, and the books say it's a remnant of the worship of Bel, the sun-god. How old we are, after all, you and I, how old our hearts are. The creeds pass like the men that made them, but underneath the creeds there's still the heart of man."

The murmuring of the waters had passed into his voice, which sounded like that of a man in a trance. She listened almost in awe, for her power over the boy seemed to be turning him into a poet.

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"Come," he said, holding out his hand as he rose, for their quiet corner had become hateful.

They stumbled, clinging hand in hand, over the half-human mounds that mark the burial-place of bygone ages. They were finally glad to stand within the low walls of St. Juliot's Chapel, and to lean against the square, rude altar.

The Atlantic lay beneath them, flashing into foam where the rollers broke in their mad haste to escape the lash of the wind-flaws. Every headland, as far as eye could reach, sent up columns of spray. The whole world faded into a sea that swirled and buffeted the two together. Their senses seemed caught in an eddy that whirled them closer and closer, as the maelstrom sucks two twigs to the bottom. They stood, half clinging to the altar. For a moment breath and consciousness failed, and Wilmot awoke to find her hand pressed close beneath his on the rough, weathered surface of the altar. His pressure drove her ring into her hand, but she was glad of the pain, for it kept her mind away from the real fear of the moment—the storm she knew to be beating in the boy's heart.

But a wild elation possessed him now. "The creeds pass like the men that made them," he whispered to her, "but the altars stay, altars to devil or sun-god, to the White Christ or to Aphrodite, who cares?"

His hands pressed hers closer into the stone. "Swear to me with your hand on the altar," he said. But she never knew what the oath was, for the rest of his words died on his lips.

Afterwards her mind would wander into the land of dreams for that oath which they swore.

But no human storm lasts long in such creatures of a day as men and women, and too tired for more emotion, Archelaus loosed his clasp and helped her down the rocky paths from the Head.



## The Altar of Aphrodite 33

And the little god that sets up a stage within us was very merciful to the lad, for while the moonlight faded above St. Piran's, Archelaus lay asleep, seeing visions of things that never could be in fact, since in his dreams Wilmot answered his appeal as she never would in reality, coming, indeed, as the elect lady.

It was a man who woke from that sleep; somewhere in it he had buried his youth. For that has passed from us when we can dream dreams without seeing ourselves as the chief protagonist of the drama. The power of seeing ourselves in fancy heroic and suffering, yet strong, the centre of things, fades slowly, as youth goes, with most; with Archelaus it was gone in a night. He had buried once and for all the "little brother," the man who might have been, the man who in youth had known a flawless woman, and could carry the memory of her into manhood.

It was, moreover, an artist who awoke; somehow, it seemed to Archelaus that he could paint, or rather could see what he wanted to paint, for the first time in his life. For to make an artist thrill with one note only in the gamut of human emotions, is to set him in the way of comprehending all the sounds, which is just where artists differ from other folk, to whom the note they have sung in youth remains their first and last: to whom the charm of a woman gives no clue to the mystery of pain, or to the passion for truth, interprets nothing of the warmth of life in spring, or of the numbness of death in winter.

During the moment after his waking Wilmot was forgotten; Archelaus only wanted to find himself alone before an easel. He was on fire to start, and the day began by a swim and a big breakfast. Then he tried furiously to set down what he knew—the sea-wind, the salt sting, and the human lives. For to-day he was the potential artist; artist, truly, by the gift of God: whether he would ever be actual

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artist depended, as always, on the co-operation of man. For with either small or great artist, it is the same : he needs freedom and material support, and these things depend on his fellows. The most curious page in history it is which tells how men have helped their artists. Did they not, in their loving care of him, reward the artist in figures who spanned the spaces of heaven, and banded the stellar hosts together with—a mastership of the Mint, £1200 a year and routine work, so putting an end to his artistry for ever?

So Archelaus worked on, while, for the time, his longings faded, and the thing he saw grew clearer within him—the lives of fisherfolk, and the age-long patience of them ; brutal, yet divine ; sordid, yet splendid, if only from their background of sea-winds, sky-spaces, and the Will behind all these which to their simple faith sends both travail pains and stark death, aching muscles and dreamless sleep.

The artist was awake, and even sang at his work, for there is no good on earth like this possession—while it lasts. Mrs. Rouncevell had been summoned away to nurse a sister, and Archelaus was alone, save for Tryphena, who watched him curiously, and brought him food at intervals. The issue of all this was beyond her.

But the man within Archelaus waited for its hour till this fever of creation was over. Just as the child plays at make-belief with everything, so Archelaus's love had been make-belief—while he was a child. In his make-belief he had called his manhood into being, and it waited for him, even though his toy was broken.

All the while Wilmot thought only of Mrs. Rouncevell, to whom she had been cruel, for the whip of a broken law is feather-light compared with the lash our own minds carry within us for the cruelty we commit.

## CHAPTER V

### GRATA QUIES

ON an easel set up in St. Piran's garden, amid a litter of sycamore leaves and trailing *Osmunda* ferns, there stood a picture. Over the western wall of the quadrangle, the glow of sunset was beginning to flame like a fire at the gate of a beleaguered city; on the wall beneath the glow there had been nailed an iron cross, taken probably from the ruins of St. Piran's Chapel, on the site of which stood the present house. The house door, framed in black oak covered with carving, stood open, and through the house, passing from door to door, there came the snoring of the breakers.

In the pearly clearness of the air the picture startled, though the subject was quiet enough. It was merely a study of mist lying over a fishing fleet; not the autumn ground mist that hovers above the earth, like the visible creative spirit of fruitfulness, but a moving south-wester that bellied the ochreous sails with sodden freshness and gemmed the tackle with cloud colours. For the sea wind in the picture moved, laying clammy fingers on all it met, till one could hear the oily lap of the water against the gunwales of the boats and feel the rise and fall of drowned hands below the waves. Whoever looked at the picture with seeing eyes would carry with him the spirit of the mist, even into the sandiest desert of the East.

The hands of the painter burnt with fever, his heart beat furiously, as it were with the stir of conception, till the last touches were given. He had long ago given up using the study from which he was painting the larger picture and now

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worked from instinct, for thought of his work was scarcely present in his mind amid the images of his brain. The time was short and the light rapidly failing. At last, with a rapid turn of the wrist, he painted in the title, "Grata Quies," and then his signature—Archelaus Rouncevell.

With the signature, his thoughts, kept at bay during the daylight by hard toil, had their own way. Yet for a second the artist joy possessed him, for Archelaus Rouncevell had just finished the one picture of his that was alive. The gladness of creation, of the emotion felt and incarnated, of the grain stored, of the hidden child brought to life: these pushed aside all the thoughts that lay in the background of his mind.

But the comfort passed as his eyes fell on the name he had written—Archelaus Rouncevell. It had been his father's name, and to-night it seemed to belong more to his father than to himself.

He remembered a remark of Tryphena's, overheard by him as a child, but only now understood as she had meant it. It was, "That's the worst of being a woman, for you never can bear a child but there must be something of a man in him."

Now, Tryphena was a man-hater by profession, but he understood her well enough to-night. For he knew now that he was the true son of Archelaus Rouncevell—not only bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, but, as it seemed, soul of his soul. And no one had ever been able to discover any good in Archelaus Rouncevell, the elder.

Suddenly, as he stood looking on the picture, an intense weariness made itself felt in his frame, and with the weariness came a parching thirst, the result of hours of feverish toil. Passing under the black-framed doorway, he walked through the house to the courtyard. Here was the well, a stream of water just outside the door, bubbling in ever-fresh supplies from unseen springs and disappearing again into the earth, a part, no doubt, of the ancient spring which

caused the monastic settlement of St. Piran to be built just on this site. As is usual in the West country, the sides of the well were protected by a slate roof and provided with shelves of slate, on which were placed butter, cream and milk in the heat of summer. Polypody and hartstongue fern grew in the crannies of the slate.

Leaning one hand on the slate roof Archelaus stooped to lift a jug of milk from the shelf. As he bent, the sunset rays, filtering in splendour through the belt of sycamores, fell in a long line through the mouth of the well, dyeing his right hand crimson. For a moment he paused, recalling the western light as it falls on the bark of the Scotch fir: he had always intended to paint that effect, but he would never do it now. The thought caused him more regret than was reasonable, for were there not many things besides Scotch firs in sunset left unenjoyed? As he lifted the jug to his lips the light faded, and with its going he noted the extraordinary acuteness of his senses: from one side he could hear the rattle of the pebbles as the waves receded, though the sea was quiet to-night and lay several fields' lengths away; from inland he could hear the sighing of fir trees up the valley, though the night was almost windless. Had he placed his head on the ground, it seemed he could have heard the grass blade grow and the worm burrow.

He drank deeply, till suddenly the saltness of the draught struck him, for the taste was nauseous. In his fevered state of mind came the buzzing of quotations, for his brain was a whispering-gallery to-night, where the echoes of all that men have ever said seemed to sound for ever.

Then he remembered the cause of this saltness—he had taken the buttermilk laid aside for to-morrow's cakes instead of milk. In an access of self-pity at all the simple hearth-pleasures that he must lose, he stood till the old eight-day clock within warned for a strike: it was five

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minutes to the hour, and at the hour Wilmot had promised to meet him ; he must be gone before then.

It was dim in the low-ceiled, oak-timbered room by now, and although he knew the time perfectly he struck a match and held it to the brass clock-face. The light burnt down to his finger-tips as he stood, and in those seconds he lived over again the dream that had first shown him what lay beneath the mysterious glamour of these last few days : a dream of crowds passing ever closer and closer, till, to save Wilmot from the press, he had slipped an arm round her and felt the lithe woman's body against his sturdy man's frame. Then he awoke to the knowledge that, artist as he might be, the passions of his forefathers were awake in him. The shadow thrown by his body in the candle-lit room made him afraid that night, as he thought of his mother's teaching of woman as the most subtly baited hook among the devil's fishing-tackle. "But he knoweth not that the dead are there ; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." For the bitterest drop of all was a sense of some truth in the words as applied to Wilmot. Sweet and good as she was, he convicted her of recklessness. And yet had she not, after all, merely reckoned him noble and simple to match herself.

At that his nobility of nature was roused to emulation, for at the back of his frenzy of despair was the love that asks, "What can I give?" not "What can I get?" For "love" was, after all, the true word, as he knew well enough.

There was one way only of magnanimity, it seemed—to be gone before she came. Suddenly the thought struck him that it was Wilmot herself who would find him, if he died here, for Tryphena was gone for an hour at least. With quick decision he went upstairs and soon returned dressed in a fisherman's jersey and trousers. He scrawled a few lines and twisted the note in the way Wilmot had

taught him, leaving it, addressed to her, on the dark polished table.

He had written: "We are all ghosts, ghosts of dead men, who cannot get their rest till we give it them. I cannot tell whether it is I or my father that is going to rest to-night. Never give me a sad thought. Mother will understand. I cannot tell whether you will, but I think so."

Then the door banged behind him.

There was a long silence in the old room, during which it seemed that the fire ceased to crackle and the clock to tick. Then the room did what the world has done ever since the world began—went its own way. The clock ticked, the fire crackled, and a mouse came out of the wainscot and minded his own affairs. Like the rest of us, that mouse, who live in the houses of bygone tragedies and walk along roads where bleeding feet have trudged—and pay no heed.

Archelaus caught his breath with a sob as the drip of spray from the Elephant rock reached him, and the first wave curled across his feet. He had not stripped, for he wished to leave no traces, and like a weary man too tired to throw off his clothes he plunged. On and on he swam, for he wished to avoid all possibility of the tide bringing his body ashore. Unconsciously he was working the fever of body and mind into health with every stroke. He was a good swimmer, indeed, but he had never felt such tireless strength before, encumbered though he was.

At last there was nothing but sea and sky and the phosphorescent trail in his wake. The visions of his brain dwindled in the monotony of swirling sound, as his will failed slowly in the cold of long immersion. Then a ludicrous difficulty appeared: it seemed the water would not drown one. It upheld, it clasped, and sinking seemed impossible. At last weariness weighed him down, his eyelids first, his limbs next, and drowning seemed easy enough, for his strokes

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became leaden. With the coming of death awoke the will to live, for the fever had faded with the coming of weariness.

Just at that moment he heard the paddle-wheels of a steamer. The sound came nearer; his half-numbered senses were aroused by a final effort of will and he shouted. The engine slowed down, he heard, but only faintly for the roaring in his ears. Ages passed till he felt himself seized and jerked across the gunwale of a boat and lay in a faint in the bottom of it.

He came to himself with half a pint of rum and water inside him and a dirty wad of blankets rolled round him. The surge of the oil in the overhead cabin light as he lay in the skipper's berth first attracted his gaze. Then he found a haze of tobacco smoke and in the midst of it the skipper.

"Pretty nigh dead meat that time," said the latter, pausing to expectorate. "No notion how you got there; lumbering up the scuppers of the Channel, I suppose?"

"I have a notion," said Archelaus, feebly. "Swam beyond my strength, I think."

As a fact, his knowledge of the past was of the vaguest.

"Grub?" queried the captain, jerking his thumb in the direction of a slab of corned beef.

"Something to drink, that's all."

He was accommodated with some ship's cocoa, and lay trying to find out which whirl was the throb of the engine and which the throb of his pulses.

"This here's the *Perseverance*, general cargo of Bristol, for Padstow," observed the captain. "We'll make it by first tide to-morrow. Put you ashore there, so you can let your friends know they haven't escaped you so easy as they thought."

He was plainly puzzled, as Archelaus began to see. The nearer the truth, the easier believed, he seemed to have heard.

"I've been staying at Bottreaux," he began, "and thought I'd have a night swim. Then I couldn't get back."



"Oh," said the skipper. He was plainly demanding something more satisfying.

"Fact is, I didn't want to. I'd—I'd made the place too hot for me."

"Gals?" breathed the skipper.

"I don't say it wasn't," said Archelaus.

Plainly the man had a three-volume novel in his head already.

"Queer," said the latter, after a pause; "land's easier way mostly to get away."

"I got mad, I suppose."

"Well, it's no business of mine. I'll give 'ee a passage, and no questions asked."

"I'll pay fare, if there's anything in my pockets."

"Watch-chain, fifteen shillen," said the captain, blandly.

Archelaus fell asleep. It seemed hours later when he awoke, and found the skipper still sitting smoking. He was evidently also still looking for information.

"I don't hold with keepin' company myself," he said, blandly continuing the conversation, as if it had never been interrupted. "I'm going to retire and keep a public, but I'll have no missus to it. I'll have a smart barmaid and change her often. I'm all for fresh faces, I be. If you've a missus, you get to know her better'n your own mug. And as for kids—why, kids *be* but kids, take 'em how you will. And a deal o' trouble, up and down, with 'em when they're teething, or summat's wrong with their blessed insides. And their insides mostly be wrong, too, by what I can make out. And if you find yourself taken up with a gal, why, cut and run, say I."

"I want to get abroad, if I can, but I'll have to do it cheap somehow."

"Ay, sea's between us both ha' roared; best line to the whole chanty," bellowed he, and rubbed a stubby forefinger

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along the great wrinkle in his cheek, which was so deep that it missed his usual shaving operation, and had become quite mossy.

It was a cheery, apple-cheeked old face, after all, and when he had next morning fitted out Archelaus with a suit of seaman's slops and a note of introduction to a Plymouth skipper in the line of "mutton ships," it was with sincere regret that Archelaus said good-bye. Moreover, he refused to take any money from the lad, save for the suit, with which to pay the mate who had supplied it. In truth, Skipper Chynoweth dearly loved drama, especially when he invented half of it himself. Given opportunity, he would have made a Jacobs-like novelist, but "chill penury repressed his noble rage"—for invention.

Two days later, at the post-box by the Barbican Bethel, in the dreary drift of a sea-mist, Archelaus posted a farewell letter to his mother. He was a 'foremast hand on a steamer bound for Quebec, for the mutton-ship captain had found a berth for him in another boat, and kept the fact secret. He wrote no good-bye to Wilmot; for, to his own fancy, it was one man that plunged into the sea at Bossiney, and another whom the crew jerked on board the *Perseverance*. With the latter man she could have nothing to do. Indeed, the first step upwards into manhood is often just forgetfulness. On the whole, it was a gallant enough memory that remained to Archelaus, for he had surely tried to live up to the Puritan war-cry, "If thine eye offend thee, pull it out." And, as he was to learn, if the ghosts of the dead come back to us, who yet live, it is but that they may win through us the battles they lost long ago. With this thought Archelaus Rouncevell the younger could think justly, even kindly, of Archelaus Rouncevell the elder. Something of this crept, too, into his mother's sad heart. For she understood better than any one the boy's mind, bitter as was her loneliness.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DANAË SHOWER

"Aw, my dear life," said Tryphena White, "and to think that I should have said she wasn't a proper little wife. Dr. Borlace won't know himself for pride, for he thinks more of a cheeld than of all the old folks put together. I've heard him say they are but churchyard sod, the old ones, after all, but a cheeld's a bit of new life."

"Blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them," chuckled Mrs. Quick.

It was the evening of the day on which Archelaus had finished his picture. Tryphena on her way to her marketing had called on Mrs. Quick, and the two were crouching, crone-like, at the end of the room. Wilmot, against her will, caught their words from the cliff-garden where she was sitting. She shivered as she recognized the feminine perturbation of which she was to be the centre for months to come. In her excitement a new voice seemed to join the crone-cackle, her husband's, though he was at Challacombe, in the next county.

"A new heaven and a new earth, madam," she could hear his voice declare, "that's what every baby means—and an infernal old earth at that, too."

"Yes," she said to herself in awe, "it's the Danaë shower, bringing new life. One is merry and forgets—and then there comes a finger out of the dark and touches one—so. Then one remembers."

The coming of the Danaë shower, as she called it, the

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promise of a child to herself and Dr. Borlace, had at last brought home to her the awful sense of the human bond. Mrs. Rouncevell had appealed to her for help, had asked, as woman from woman, for bread, and she had given in return a serpent, not a stone. All the time, bound as she was by the deepest tie to another man, she had played the part of Lilith.

Numbed for the time by merciful deadness, she listened to the cackle of the two.

"And," said Tryphena, "he's a knowledgeable chap, too, in some ways. For there's many a cheeld born straight that would have been crooked, if Dr. Tony hadn't been to the birth of 'en."

It was the finest eulogy that Dr. Borlace was ever likely to win, and one that would have delighted him.

"He's overfond of the knife, for my part," said Mrs. Quick; "but they're all like that nowadays, cutting and limbing when a little digitalis or pellitory of the wall would remove the trouble."

With fine feminine contempt for details, Mrs. Quick referred to the curative effect of country remedies as suitable for surgical cases.

"Too curious by half," said Tryphena, "wanting to know everything that goes on in a body's inside, same as if they were the makers of it. There's One above that knows where the aches come from; and if the Almighty had wanted our works looked to, why, He'd have put them outside, I say."

"And that's a true word, Tryphena, if you never speak another," said Mrs. Quick.

"But," answered Tryphena, "I must be going, for I put the clock on half an hour, and so Archelaus will be wanting his supper. I wouldn't have him late for everything, that I was determined."

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Wilmot suddenly started up; then Archelaus must have been expecting her for some time, for she had promised to see him to-night once more. A dread that she scarcely dared to formulate, even to herself, began to seize her, for the lad must have been waiting alone a long time. In some strange way she felt herself the centre of an equilibrium of unknown forces that held the future of many lives in suspension. For life and death, burgeoning and fading, were weaving a net of which she was the centre.

As Wilmot drew near St. Piran's she heard the low moaning of a dog. It was merely shut in an outhouse and lonely, but the crying of the animal seemed to bring relief to the woman's overstrained nerves. For in her the outward relief of a cry was stifled by the tense instinct of repression, and her terror gained relief through the action of another creature's nerves.

There seemed to be a mist in the oak doorway. As she put out her hand gropingly the dog's whine ceased for a moment and the mist thickened. Her right foot kicked the doorway, and she remembered Mrs. Rouncevell. The pain was, however, a relief, for all her nature seemed to be seeking outward means of distraction. She found a brass candlestick on the mantelpiece, and stooped to light it at the fire.

Then she saw the letter; as she read it the truth which she grasped drew from her a little cry—the moan that the sheep gives when the butcher shears the wool on its throat for a surer blow; it is a low, unexigent cry, the protest of weakness against might, that falls on deaf ears.

Suddenly Wilmot dropped the letter, for there seemed to be a footfall outside. She ran hurriedly into the passage, and through into the quadrangle at the back, where the picture still stood on its easel; there was a gateway into the road, and by this she meant to escape. Conscious of intense

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chill, she picked up a coat which lay across a rickety wooden chair.

The moaning of the dog harassed her now, for it seemed cruel to allow any pain to continue which one could possibly prevent, and she found time to unlatch the barn door as she passed. The dog came jumping out against her, and she saw, with sudden surprise, the moist, red tongue leap out in joyous greeting. Then he fled to the cliffs, the huddled rush of startled animals marking his passage. Too late she recognized that she had done mischief, for she remembered that Nero had been suspected of sheep-worrying.

Hurriedly climbing the low stone walls that intersect the cliff pastures, she fell once or twice, but scrambled on till the white cliff, called the Ladies' Windows, came in sight: the slate, weathered into great holes by the storms of ages, caught her eye; there would be shelter there in a nook on the landward side. Here she crouched, listening to the sobbing wail of the wind from off the sea, as it beat against the buttresses of rock. This was all she heard or knew for a long while, till that inward force which saves and heals, even in the direst extremity, the god within the breast, pressed on her with mesmeric power, and she fell into unconsciousness.

Some time after the chill air did its work and awoke her. She lay for several moments watching a tuft of fern in a cranny of the crumbling rock.

Drifts of mist clothed the green of the ravine below her in a diaphanous drapery, and the moon shone through mist curtains, earth-begotten. Through the rifts in the mist the treeless slopes shone faintly luminous, and to the side the bare outlines of the Ladies' Windows, three in number, gleamed like a white face with the cold light of the east on it. Across a grass slope opposite her an inland crag pointed

upwards, naked and stark, like a limb of earth pushed from its vesture. Under the mist and the moonlight the sea returned to the primæval undertone, which it used in the days of the mastodon, ere man girdled the sea with his cables.

The spell was broken at last by the clanging of iron chains, and with a shiver Wilmot awoke to face life under its new conditions. Up to this moment she had been possessed by the magnetism of terror. Like a hunter kept spellbound by the tiger, she had barely felt at all. Now the tiger seemed to turn his head aside for a moment and the consciousness came. Then she wondered what was the cause of the clanging which had roused her.

Huddled at the foot of the crag were twenty or thirty sheep chained together, two by two, a vigorous to a lethargic one, lest in cropping, the more active should slip from the steep cliffs. A sudden movement on her part had roused them, and with their movement she could smell the oily odour from their coats. The homely scent was comforting, but as she rose, the frightened flock fled to a higher point, their legs unseen in the ground mist, and their woolly backs rising into the moonlight above.

Passing through one of the "Windows," Wilmot stepped out on the ledge that runs above the sea on the cliff side. The sea-murmur came up hushed and sibilant, and the moonlight made a glittering pathway over it. Steadily she walked along the ledge to its extremity; no feat at all difficult for a firm nerve, but in ordinary moments she could not have accomplished it. At the end she sat down, and with clinging hands clasped the jagged stone, and bent towards the sea. Dragging the heavy coat forward, she gave it a push. It fell, but her heart reproached her for the joy she felt at the severing of the last tie which seemed to bind her to Archelaus. There was no splash, and strain

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her eyes as she might, she could see nothing under the mist.

Then a tuft of sea-thrift, growing at the edge of the stone shelf, caught her errant fancy. The flower-heads were bleached white, the seed-germs scattered long ago fruitlessly into the waves. Yet the sea-thrift bore its fruit and fulfilled the law of its life.

From the plant her mind turned to the day she had spent on Bossiney sands, before this horror befell her. She saw again the play of life in the lads that tossed the ball in the surf. Then life called in her, as it has called across the ages, to woman after woman, the same life that fashioned the boy's breast and the sea-thrift's inflorescence. Her thought knew no distinction between the two, but she felt that with the very last nerve-thrill she must obey that call. The dead must bury their dead when life calls.

But the call was not so easily answered just now, for fear and dizziness seized her at thought of the place where she sat. She cautiously pulled off her shoes, for in her stockinged feet she fancied it would not be so easy to slip on the shelving surface. Even in this extremity, Wilmot was a poor woman, for the shoes were almost new, and she could not afford to send them to follow the coat. She carefully, with shaking hands, tied the laces together and slung them over her arm. At last, pressing close to the cliff, she passed safely through the Window and on to the grass again.

The instinct of self-preservation, the need of food and rest and warmth, took possession of her now ; but in order to return to Bossiney she must strike the road somewhere, and this necessitated a scramble, unless she were willing to return by way of St. Piran's, which was impossible. The moon-light was conquering the mist by now, and the black cliffs were casting shadows almost as dark as themselves as she



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reached a point whence she could look down on the sands of Bossiney Bay. The Elephant rock flung grotesque shadows of massive limbs, and the impassivity of the iron coast was terrible. At first she hesitated as to whether she should knock at the door of a white-washed cottage that turned its back on the sea, which all humanity has learnt to dread on this coast, but the fear of facing strange people, who, she fancied, might read her dread in her face, drove her on to the white road, that wound like an endless ribbon before her. She measured the way for her weariness by the landmarks she remembered—a tree, a gate; so many to be passed in her road till she could reach home.

Weariness was fairly mastering her, when at a turn of the road she came upon Tryphena, who raised a joyous cry at the sight of her.

"Praise be," said she, "that I've found 'ee at last. My mind misgave me, when I found you'd gone not to your mother's."

"Does mother know?" gasped Wilmot, as the good woman tucked her arm comfortably under her own.

"Not a word about you. She thinks you're in your room. For I went up to look and brought down word that you didn't want to be disturbed. I thought you'd enough to bear without being gallied with questions. For the whole place is on the search for 'en now. I found the letter you dropped."

The road was easier since two now trod it, and Tryphena, leading the way round to the back of Mrs. Quick's house, soon forced a way in, by slipping Wilmot's knife between the sashes of the kitchen window. It would be unfair to say that Tryphena enjoyed herself, but under all circumstances there is pleasure in feeling yourself the pivot on which things turn. She quickly lit a lamp, and stirred up the red-hot ashes into life with a handful of sticks.

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"And your feet streaming leaking," said she, beginning to pull off the sodden stockings, dripping from the grass, for Wilmot's shoes still hung from her arm. "Wherever have 'ee been to? I thought you'd be mazed like, only I couldn't send to find out, for I mid so well ha' sent the town-crier. Besides, they're all out searchin' the cliffs."

But Wilmot was beyond words ; only a long shiver came from time to time. At last Tryphena stole away to the sitting-room to fetch cushions and rugs. Piling them up on the settle, she made Wilmot lie in the cheerful blaze that now flamed in the fireplace, below the "blower" of lilac print, put up to keep back the smoke.

The warmth at last awoke Wilmot. Suddenly she jumped up from the nest that Tryphena had made for her : the long finger of a moon-ray from the undraped window was touching the white table-cloth, shining blue and phosphorescent against the lamplight. It seemed like a corpse-candle.

"Put up the table-cloth against the window," she cried, "to shut out that light."

In terror the two women dragged off the cloth and pinned it against the window. As they did so a gull dashed itself against the lighted square. The shock brought tears at last.

"Thanks be," said Tryphena, hurrying to close the door into the lobby, lest Mrs. Quick should hear. "A tearless trouble rips the vitals. But you've naught to fear, for I've got the letter he wrote you in my pocket. And nobody knows of it, but you and me. That's why I knowed he was gone."

Tryphena stood patting her charge's shoulder steadily, as if she had been soothing a child.

"I killed him," said Wilmot, at last.

"Well, and if you did," retorted Tryphena, her nostril

quivering and her crisp hair bristling, as if some wrecker ancestor were awake in her—"and if you did, shan't a woman have the right to kill a man now and then, when you think upon the trouble she's put to wi' every cheeld that comes into this here world? I tell 'ee, 'tis but our right—a life here and there. They kill easy enough, the men that never know what life costs."

"How did you get away, Tryphena, from there?" asked Wilmot.

"Why, easy enough. There's constables there and half the parish, I'll warn, by now. They didn't pay no heed to me when I slipped out."

She was cutting squares of bread for the milk that stood in its saucepan on the fire.

"You make bread and milk like my old nurse," said Wilmot, as if there were hundreds of ways of cooking that complicated dish.

As Tryphena brought her the basin, she voiced the physical fear that had been secretly troubling her.

"Tryphena," she said, "shall I ever sleep again? It seems to me I never can. The mill inside me will never stop, I think."

"Sakes," said Tryphena, "you'll sleep right enough. You'm like my old father that used to say a couldn't touch pudden with his boiled pork, and then 'ud eat half a pound."

She was herself swallowing that extraordinary compound called "kettle broth," made of hot water, bread, a dash of milk, and a piece of butter.

"It don't do to be too tender, my dear; what's done is done. You didn't mean it, and perhaps 'twas as well. I'll tell 'ee a little story," she said, sitting down by the settle where Wilmot crouched among the cushions. "It's an awful one, but as true as the Book. There was a poor deformed woman as had a cheeld born in the union, and then they saw

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'twould be the same as the mother, what the boys pointed at in the street."

"Go on," said Wilmot, glad to lose her misery in the thought of a trouble worse than hers.

"Well, the nurse said one day, 'What a pity it won't die. It never by good rights ought to ha' been born.' Her never thought it, but the mother overheard her say it, and in her weakness the poor soul brooded and brooded over what her'd heard. Her watched the cheeld by her side, till her couldn't bear it—to think that her cheeld should grow up like her."

"She ought to have killed it," said Wilmot, in a low voice; "nobody else would care enough for it to do that."

"That's just what she thought too," said Tryphena. "She told 'em, when they come to try her for it, how she held a pillow 'pon its little face, and its little hand was on her breast all the time she did it."

"She loved it, that was why."

"So they thought, for they sent her to a home, and all her wanted there was to have a little cheeld to hold once more. Try to think upon it, my dear," said Tryphena, gently, "for there's deformed in mind as well as in body, and maybe 'twas all for the best for Archelaus. He'd a queer twist, I've always thought. Mrs. Rouncevell knowed more about his father than her ever told, and her stuffed 'en with notions, different from what a boy ought to have."

So Tryphena, with her fierce instinct against the tyranny of the male, of the big brute force, was in her humble way a cup of strength to Wilmot, who fell at last asleep, holding her hand. Pins and needles came to poor Tryphena, but she bore them bravely, till the hand relaxed of itself. She dared not put out the lamp till the dawn was coming, for at every attempt she made to do so, her charge half awoke in instinctive terror of the darkness.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE QUICK OF THE SOUL

THE day after the disappearance of Archelaus was market-day at Bottreaux, and Wilmot, fearing the curious eyes of strangers, kept herself shut up all day in the house with her mother and her sister, Venny, who was usually on such days dropped, with her son, to spend the day at Mrs. Quick's in Bossiney, and fetched therefrom by her husband in the evening on his way home from the market.

The three women, left to themselves, had been, woman-fashion, calculating strains—nervous ones—all day. With Venny such strains took the healthy outlet of temper, for to her there were no mysteries in the world, except Wilmot's "fancies," and the tendency of her own waist to rotundity. Accordingly, she always slept eight solid hours out of the twenty-four, consumed regularly much ox-beef and homemade bread, laughed a wide jolly laugh that showed perfect teeth, and polished her splendid body till it shone again. She had, however, one grievance, and the prolonged society of her sister always brought the fact terribly to mind: it was a very sore subject that the ugly duckling, the "changeling," had accomplished a marriage with a professional man, "of a sort," as she was accustomed to say. Worse than all, though all agog for news, beyond the bare fact that Archelaus Rouncevell had disappeared, she could learn nothing from Wilmot, who must have been able to unfold a tale, had she chosen.

To escape Venny's cannonade of hints, Wilmot tried at last to distract her fretted nerves by showing pictures to small Ambrose, a solid British child of realistic tendency.

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On the picture of the infant Moses there were some damp spots on the paper.

"That's the fleas," he said, jabbing with a podgy finger at the spots; "where Moses lived they had 'em. Our dog, Help, has 'em, only he digs 'em out."

This was too much for Mrs. Quick: she scented the battle afar.

"I should have thought, Venny," she said severely, "that you would have had your feather-beds cleaned regularly. I never let mine go more than a year. The dear child evidently has his eyes open."

Let the philosopher who affirms the non-existence of matter pass an hour in the society of Mrs. Quick: he will soon feel the material envelope of the soul, which begins with flesh and linen, and ends with the constellations, to be a pretty salient fact. To escape the housekeeping wrangle that followed, Wilmot left the room hurriedly, and slipped out of the house.

Driven by the stress of restlessness, she hurried along the lonely cliffs till she stood looking down on to the land-locked harbour of Bottreaux, into whose tortuous channel the Atlantic rollers rush with such force that the ship cables used there have to be the hawsers of an East Indiaman, and even then they often snap like tow. Every human note is to be found in the scene: the terror of the chasm of raging Blackapit, where a man could be dashed to pieces without a cry reaching human ears for the roar of the waves; the grotesquerie of the black mummy head of Profile Point; the sordidness of the mud flats where the river joins the clouded emerald of the sea; the everyday homeliness of the boats. And yet, mockery of human life as it seemed, the loneliness of sea and rock stilled the fret of personality: to live on such a coast as this is to learn the fatalism, and the calm springing from it, that men always

## The Quick of the Soul 55

acquire in face of the resistless might of nature. From the road above, Bottreaux stands out, a black fortress in an iridescent sea of foam, like the wonderful land of youth set in the midst of fairy seas, though, seen closer, it fades into homeliness. But at night, when the moon rises, the homeliness is lost in awe, when the black cliffs loom through the silver spray from the blow-holes; in all these moods Bottreaux being, indeed, strangely like the human life which it often destroys.

As Wilmot watched the light fading over the harbour, terror seemed the prevailing note, for what answer to her questions could not these waters give, if they would but lose for a moment their inhuman aloofness? As she turned to retrace her steps up the winding path by which she had come, she saw a man approaching her. With a throb of relief she recognized her husband, Dr. Borlace.

"How did you know?" she said, hurrying to meet him. "Oh, Tony, I'm so glad to see you."

"Tryphena wired to me this morning. I've to drive back to the junction to-night to catch the mail, but I thought if I drove both ways the trains would give me an hour or two with you, for which you might be the better."

The railway line only runs within four miles of Bottreaux, and Wilmot knew that he must have found it difficult to sacrifice a full day to her in order to come from Challacombe. After all, Tony was a comforting, reliable kind of creature, and at the moment she felt a hearty pity for the lone women who do not know what "yours to command" really means in a man.

"And you know what's happened?" she asked, with a sick weariness at the details of an event which seemed now to belong to a far past time.

"Yes," he answered curtly.

"Is there anything more found out?"

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"No, nor will be, I should say," he said, drawing her arm within his.

The face of the doctor was full of contradictions. Nature had evidently started with the intention of producing the clear-cut, legal face, with its masterful nose, and ugly mobile lips. Then she suddenly changed her mind and gave him a lightly moulded jaw and eye-corner wrinkles of a kind that instantly gained him every child's confidence and every man's sense of goodfellowship. Finally, she contradicted these wrinkles, always the most expressive part of the adult face, by two savage furrows between the eyes and a three-cornered smile. A human Puck, in short, of whom it would be difficult to predict anything, save that he would make many experiments, and never force a way to his aim with that consistent disregard of other people that most aims demand. As a fact, Dr. Tony would not so much as kick a dog out of his way when he was running to catch the last train of the day. "Lord, what fools these mortals be," he often cried, but knew himself to be the biggest fool of the lot.

"You think he's dead," whispered Wilmot, after a long silence.

"I fear so."

"I want to tell you everything; it would be a relief to me."

"That's why I am here now; for, of course, I want to know how you come into this wretched affair. You must come in somewhere," he said to himself.]

In answer she held up to him a crumpled paper; it was Archelaus's letter.

He read it, bending forward in the dim light of coming night. Wilmot felt curiously grateful that, unlike most people, he appeared not to have judged her beforehand.

"Any one seen this?" he asked at length.

"No one but Tryphena. I left it behind me at St. Piran's, and she brought it to me."



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"Good old Tryphena! You must never say anything about it, for this would be nuts to every gossip of the place. We'll destroy it at once. Now tell me."

"I—cannot."

"I've a right to know. Why did he write like this to you? He evidently thinks you will suppose yourself to blame. Are you? You were always together when I was here."

"Say 'we' were, Tony."

"Well, 'we' were, then. And I suppose it went on after I left."

"You never said there was any harm in it then."

"I don't say so now, do I? Come, speak up, Wilmot."

"I was not to blame."

Dr. Borlace shrugged his shoulders with an inward curse at the *femina mendax*.

"I suppose," he said, fishing for tobacco and a pipe, "he fancied himself in love with you."

"I suppose he did."

"Say you knew it. And you played with him—amused yourself, in short."

"Yes, I knew it," she flashed, standing away from him; "and hadn't I a right to? Oh, I know what you are thinking, of course, that because I was married to you, I oughtn't to have let him feel like that."

"Well," said Dr. Borlace, with a short laugh, "it's rather an obvious point, I should say. Not that I wish to press it at all. If you didn't feel you had any duty to me, that's your affair."

"I can tell you now," she said bitterly. "I felt I had no duty to you, or half felt it. You just married me as you would have engaged a servant. Oh!" she said passionately, "do you remember how you asked me to marry you? I remember every word of it."

She stood facing him, like a child who repeats a lesson.

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“Has it ever occurred to you,” she mimicked, “the possibility of our passing our lives together? It ought to have,’ you said, ‘for we are the only two people in the place with brains. Brain has precious little to do with marriage in general, but we must change all that. In the days of our great-grandfathers, when a man wanted a girl he carried her off bodily in a post-chaise. Now he only snake-charms her mind with his courting and carries her off that way. I don’t do so,’ you said. ‘Use your reasoning powers. I can give you what your adoring lover perhaps wouldn’t—and that is, respect for mind and body, always, everywhere. Both are your own. You will be your own mistress at all times.’ That was what you said.”

“And a very excellent offer, too,” said Dr. Borlace; “I still fail to see anything wrong about it. At any rate, you didn’t, for you accepted it.”

“I didn’t believe what you said,” answered Wilmot, with two points of scarlet on her white cheeks; “I thought it was just fine talk. And then I found afterwards it was true. You gave me my own way, because you didn’t care a snap of your fingers what I did. You were absorbed in your cases. I thought I’d be absorbed too, and I tried study and I tried dispensing.”

“And a damned bad dispenser at that,” said Dr. Borlace, anger mastering him.

“I know it. Dispense! I tried to make you care, I wanted to have you listen for my step—and you bent over a microscope, and didn’t know my step from a servant girl’s. Can’t you understand? I wanted just for once to know what it is to be looked at as something different from common clay. I wanted to be able to say, ‘I, too, was adored once.’ Such common women get that and I never had, for you never gave me anything but——”

“What I had offered you.”

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She made a passionate gesture of rejection.

"So you experimented," said the doctor, watching her with speculative eyes under bent brows, "with that lad?"

"Yes, I experimented; but only after I'd failed with you, remember. I wanted to try what being loved was like. I suppose that to experiment is the strongest instinct in a woman like me."

She was speaking now in the quiet level voice in which women damn themselves.

"Don't you know," he said, "that experimenting in feelings never gives you the real feeling?"

"It was all there was for me," she said.

He acknowledged silently the truth of what she said.

"But," she went on, "then I wanted power, and I felt I had it over him. I could make him thrill with a look or a touch. It was like putting one's hands on something that carried life round the world, and into the past and over to the future. You know how I like to hear the telegraph wire roar with life. He was like a human telegraph wire, with my hand on it. I never felt like that with any one else."

"And you never thought of him?"

"It was always power, and human power's best," she said, sitting down on a stile and regarding her hands. She was like an artist of the inner world lost to the dreary colouring of his everyday life.

"Tony," she said with a shiver, "I'm a ghoul, I suppose. But, oh, I never knew he would go so far. I knew he was morbid, but I thought 'twas only words. You know he tried to drown us both two days ago, and I wanted to think 'twas only carelessness, but so good a sailor as he could never have been careless like that. And he talked so much of death."

"And so you watched his mind beating up against the morbid sea of despair?"

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"Did I? I suppose I did. But I thought it was only words and thoughts. He talked of death for us both. It seemed beautiful too, as he talked."

"And if he had offered it, would you have taken it?"

"No," she said, leaning down over her clasped hands, so that he could not see her face, "I wouldn't; for I've known lately that if I took my life, I'd take another's too, and there isn't a woman yet born sinful enough to do that."

There was a tense silence and the knuckles of Dr. Tony's hand grew white as he held his pipe. The thought of her secret seemed to bring Wilmot back to womanhood.

"Did I kill him, Tony?" she whispered, with her face still hidden.

He felt more cold than he had done before. Suddenly, with her last words, she had become less a curious specimen of humanity, more a woman, and therefore more repellent in her cold-bloodedness. Then his heart smote him, for she could not but pay dearly for all this, with her intense, agonizing heart. He tried to comfort, for Dr. Borlace believed firmly in the doctrine of "tout comprendre" and "tout pardonner."

"If not you," he said, "it would have been some other woman. This madness would have come likely enough, anyway. The lad was a dreamer, but the instincts of his father, his inheritance, though he did not know it till these last few days, were beyond the control of his mind. Why, with his mother's eternal teaching, it must have seemed like diabolic possession in the white soul of a virgin."

"Tony, Tony, that isn't like you. Why, you understand."

"And I never did that before, did I?" sneered he. "No, it was his ancestry; the boy was born abnormal, for men transmit their vices to their offspring in other forms than in diseased bodies, and made more so by his mother."

## The Quick of the Soul 61

He ought to have lived in a colony of men, read Tupper, and grown turnips. The mischief is that father of his."

"But I was the woman who gave him the last push," she said.

In reality she was appalled at the depths in herself; in the background of her mind there was the feeling that she loathed with all the strength of her best nature, but still felt—the thought that, although she had never been loved before, now at last a man had died for her. And yet no man, but a boy, and then the pity dragged at the satisfaction: the woman and the snake were over-intimate with one another in the old Edenic days to have entirely lost the connection now. It is a long journey upwards for the soul of woman till she reach the plains of clear sunlight, and worse than Pope and Pagan on the mountain-side for her to slay.

"Now," said Dr. Tony, professional instinct asserting itself, "what I am going to do is to give you a sleeping-draught."

She awoke in her own room, some hours later, from the sleep into which the medicine had thrown her, to hear, from the end of her pillow, the drowsy purr of her cat, Diogenes. Seeing her move, Diogenes stretched forth a grey leg, which she seized to pull him gently nearer. There was a strong smell of tobacco in the room, and her bare foot encountered a hard object at the end of the bed. Groping, she discovered that it was the doctor's pipe, still reeking with his last libation to the god of comfort, the deity who received his most frequent offerings. She fell asleep again, with one foot curled round this little weapon, and with the paw of Diogenes in her hand. Thus some fireside comfort came into her wild, erring soul; the friendship of men and animals, kindly and easy, seemed to wrap her round from head to foot.

Dr. Borlace had a good many things to consider that day. It was additionally difficult for him, since his mind

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approached as near to the Roman view of things as it is possible for an English mind to do. Intellectually, Dr. Tony saw at present only laws and material objects in the universe ; included among the material objects were men and women, who suffered if they broke the laws, even more than did the other material objects. And the only difference between men was, according to him, that some men broke the laws and some did not—the laws being, of course, the physical ones ; for he was wont to declare that he had dissected every part of humanity save the soul, which he took to be merely the ecclesiastical name for brain.

These views of his had more effect on Wilmot than she knew, for his world seemed to her as bare and cold as a whitewashed cell, without even a window by which one could look into the silence of the sky. So she had turned her eyes downwards into the slimy depths of the pool of human folly, never seeing the stars reflected in the water, but only the ugly creatures moving about below.

He now recalled in his turn the terms of his proposal, and he could find nothing in them to provoke Wilmot's scorn. Striding along the road from Bossiney, he recalled the scene. He saw Wilmot and himself looking over the seaward-facing wall down south in the fisher-town of Challacombe.

"You'll observe," he could hear himself say, "that I haven't told you that I love you. That is throwing an atmosphere of unreality over what is just a contract."

"Oh yes," she had answered, "I observed that. Of course, a woman would be sure to notice the omission of what is usually the first step."

"You've been through something of this before?" he had asked suspiciously.

"Oh dear, no," she had laughed ; "nothing at all like this, I assure you."

"Reason I know, passion I understand," he had resumed

## The Quick of the Soul 63

solemnly. "But you're at least twenty-five, I should suppose, and must have already passed this way."

"Twenty-six," she had answered, "and I have already passed this way."

Her eyes were dancing with merriment.

"There was a boy and a man, with an eyeglass," she was numbering them off on her fingers.

"Just so," he had rejoined grimly; "we'll keep 'em for the winter evenings. I, too . . . but you don't want my stories."

"Dear, no, fair sir," she had mocked, with a curtsey.

"That's just as well, for I wasn't going to tell them," he had responded snappishly: somehow, the conversation was trying to the temper.

"That's what I thought," she had said. "But to your reasons, good doctor."

"First, I must marry, for the practice needs a fillip; then my house is managed infernally," he had said plainly, "and I shan't be likely down here to meet a woman so likely to be a comrade to me. On the other hand, I can offer you some sort of a settled home, and you'll want that some day, for Captain Penrice won't last for ever."

Suddenly she had put a hand on his arm. "You do care for me a little, Dr. Tony, don't you?" she had asked.

"I've been studying you now for weeks," he had said, feeling it must convince.

"Just like a cancer tissue," she had finished for him.

They had both laughed then, but somehow it did not seem so laughable now.

The doctor returned alone to Challacombe by the night train, for he could not induce Wilmot to leave the place where the first news would probably be heard. The house at St. Piran's was deserted now, save for Tryphena, for Mrs. Rouncevell had not been able, for all her trouble, to leave her sister, whose life depended on careful nursing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A GENTLEMAN IN HOMESPUN

"THERE'S some sort of meat you can't abide to sit down and look at," said Tryphena, with wind-like rushes up and down the long room at St. Piran's, "it's either clunk (swallow) it down at once or not at all. And when it's down you must leave it to your innerds to make the best job they can of it. Mrs. Wilmot's man seems to be like cold lickie-stew—all right when once he's down, but bad in the swallowing."

Captain Penrice, leaning cosily against the doorpost, awaited her remarks. It was three days later, and though Dr. Borlace might be content to leave Wilmot to wait at Bossiney for the news which never came, her uncle was by no means disposed to allow her to continue brooding over a tragedy in a place which must bring it constantly before her mind. Nothing more had been heard of Archelaus's fate, nothing more would be, the captain was convinced. Wilmot must, therefore, return to Challacombe, and, being a man of his word, the captain himself had come to fetch her, and had called at St. Piran's to inquire on what part of the cliffs he had better search for her.

"You tell her I say so," concluded Tryphena.

"Some people would say you'd better not swallow that sort of stuff at all, for it puts too much strain on the inside," said Captain Penrice, with a twinkle.

"When you've naught else, you can't choose. How can her get a new husband? Just you tell me that."

Captain Penrice being unable to do so, Tryphena proceeded—



## A Gentleman in Homespun 65

"Here's her staying at Bossiney. Let her go back to 'en. That's what I say. There'd never be a pig ringed nor a cheeld born, if they that had the job to do sat down too long to think of the trouble they'd to go through."

"It was the knowing woman, not the virtuous, that Solomon should have praised," said Captain Penrice, reflectively.

"I tell 'ee what it is," said Tryphena, now fairly champ-ing the bit of self-expression, "you high-learnt folks walk along with your own fancies all staring 'ee in the face, so you can't see the very ground in front of 'ee, and when you look to the side for a blink, you can't see naught but the green spots your own eye makes. You tell her to go on with what's afore her, and to start going to once."

"She shall, she shall, back to Challacombe and the lickie-stew," said the captain, turning away in the direction indicated by Tryphena.

"There's them that keeps themselves bottled," fired Tryphena, as a parting shot; "but 'tisen't in me to see things going wrong for want of a word."

Captain Penrice was of the stature which makes one believe that the statement "there were giants in the land in those days" must have referred to the West Country. Six feet three in his stockinged feet he stood, with a square head thatched with close-clipt white hair. His hazel eyes flashed a ruddy gleam with a green tinge to it at times of excitement, like the flashes of the jungle-folks' eyes. Everything about him was massive, yet not immobile; rock-like, yet volcanic: an igneous rock in process of cooling. His hammered jaw and straight lip-line could curve and wave with laughter or tenderness.

Untaught, save in a hedge school, he yet had a close acquaintance with the Elizabethan dramatists, whom he often criticised in broad Devon. Pagan in instinct as he was, the wind of Methodism had blown on him in squalls,

## 66      The Wingless Victory

and brought with it fear of hell fire, conviction of damnation, and finally, in the articles of a strict creed, port, after seas of sin. Hard drinker, hard liver: he had been both. He had seen the world in many guises, on the tramp steamer, the smart yacht, the fishing trawler. Now, in his old age, he was a first-class builder of trawl-boats in a ship-building yard that had been in the hands of a Penrice for generations. The gift of speech came to him sometimes and taught a "local preaching" what a mighty rushing wind is like from a human frame. Best of all, nothing human ever shocked him, nothing vile, so it be humanly vile, ever alienated him: verbally professing a narrow creed, in practice he was like the sun that shines on just and unjust, which is but to name him gentleman, though in homespun.

It was drawing towards high noon when the captain at last found his niece curled up on a ledge that overhung the sea.

Here the two depths met, the blue vault of sky, golden with the sun-glow, and the blue disc of sea, swept into sheets of foam-tossed shimmer by the wind-gusts from the cliff. Feathery thistledown floated high up; shags, myrrhs, and gulls flitted across the vault of air; the black points, which meant land-birds, shook, quivered, and were lost in the blue; a white butterfly flitted across the plane of sunlight; the glow grew each moment more radiant, till the sense of colour was lost in a haze of white light.

Once more the sea-born goddess, as millions of times before, leapt forth to her union with the light-bringer. Lying there, between sea and sky, Wilmot felt weightless, levitated, without need of the earth's support, and dreamt over again the stories which man crooned to himself ages ago, so that he might make himself at home in the strange world of outside nature. The laughter of Aphrodite, the very syllables of whose name incarnate the loveliness of the sea-spaces, twinkled all round the imaginative little woman.

## A Gentleman in Homespun 67

To enable man to escape from the sordidness of actual life to golden dreams : it is by this divine power that the mind atones for all the sufferings it inflicts on mortals. Wilmot, with penitence for folly behind her, and humdrum duty in front, revelled in fancies to-day. For the creed of all earth's loveliness sums itself up in the myth of the hyacinth of the sea and her lover, the gloomless God. And if the clumsy earth-mother, Demeter, the many-breasted, who bears the homeliest toil for beasts and men, be forgotten for a time, she asserts herself soon enough, after all.

Suddenly Wilmot found her uncle standing by her side. Recalled thus to actual life, she knew then, with a sudden pang, that the real place of awe is not the space of sea or land, but the inner world of the mind. Far less awful than the "not-man" of the material universe is the man within, and the baffled Prometheus, with his strange human power and weakness, expresses much more nearly the mystery of life than any myth of Apollo and Aphrodite.

Meanwhile, Captain Penrice was thinking of the awful question of human waste. Had he in his zeal given his little maid to the wrong man? Was she to join the meaningless lives of so many women? The thought jarred among his heart-strings, like a sudden consciousness of certain disaster. He had hoped to save her from the barren life of a useless woman, and he seemed to have blundered hopelessly. Yet Dr. Borlace was, for all his oddity, a good fellow; somehow, it is not *a* good fellow, but *the* good fellow, that matters in a woman's life.

"Well, little woman," he said, sitting down beside her and pushing back the dark hair over her forehead, "how goes it?"

"Sadly, Uncle Dickie, I'm afraid," she said, putting a sunburnt hand in his big, hairy one. She was always a little childish with this big man. "I'm a worry to everybody, and to myself most of all."

"I want you to come back," he said slowly, beating her

## 68      The Wingless Victory

hand up and down, "to be a worry to us down yonder to Challacombe—to Dr. Tony and me."

"Mother's been talking to you," she said; "I know it; it's no good you're saying she hasn't."

"She has. I don't deny it; and I think she's quite right. We want you, I want you, your husband wants you."

Wilmot shrugged her shoulders.

"It's true," said the old man, bending his grizzled eyebrows together in the effort to touch this wayward child somewhere in the quick, yet without hurting what was sore already. "Dr. Tony's got a hard job before him, and you can't choose but help or hinder him."

"Tony, a hard job?" she laughed incredulously. "I know he hates exertion, but, after all, that's nothing but his regular professional work, which other men take as it comes. He's broken fifteen babies' bottles since he's been at Challacombe, because he said they were dirty; but I don't know that he's done anything else different from the usual work of a medical man. You can't expect me to make a fuss over fifteen babies' bottles, though my husband did happen to break them."

Her heart was beating with a kind of rage at being put in the wrong by any one who was usually so entirely on her side as Captain Penrice.

"See here, ladybird," said the captain, "I didn't bring you up on men's books to have you turn out a little bit of a rag doll that hasn't sense enough to understand a good piece of useful work that'll stand wind and weather. You've been fed on meat, not cat-lap, and you ought to know that out in a man's world there's big things to be done—or not done—that make a difference after the man that had it to do is dead and gone."

"I know. I like men that do things," said Wilmot. "You taught me to. Don't you remember taking me down

## A Gentleman in Homespun 69

to look at the bridge over the Tamar and telling me how men would say to themselves, 'That's a fine piece of work. I wish I'd been the man to do it.'

"And yet, you little hussy, now you can't see when a man's doing a fine thing. You're like all the rest of your sex, you want a handsome young buck to strut up and down; and, like an old fool, I thought I'd taught you different."

"What is it, Uncle Dickie, that Tony's going to do?"

"Oh, it isn't anything that'll write his name on the mast-heads of sea-going vessels, and Challacombe won't put up a statue of him. It's nothing sensational, that'll send you peacocking about because you're his wife."

"Do go on, Uncle Dickie. I want to know what you mean."

"My dear, in your own silly little maze of fancies, have you ever thought of how scarce water is in Challacombe in the dry summer weather? ever seen the women standing in rows in the lower town round the pumps, when they're allowed to use 'em? ever thought of whether the water's good that comes from wells with houses and a burial-ground so near?"

"But it's been like that for years, and they say that lots of people wouldn't drink piped water, for the other's colder."

"And it's now you've hit the nail: it's just against talk like that, and sillier too, that Dr. Tony's got to fight—and is going to."

"Well," said Wilmot, driven to a last vantage ground, "let him explain. It's easy enough to show we want it. Surely they'll see. I don't think there need be much of a fuss about it."

"And that just shows your ignorance. The hardest thing in all the world to bear, my dear, is stupid spite that comes from ignorance and low thoughts. It stings like the very devil, and it's that your husband'll have to face if he means to get his way."

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"Why?"

"Challacombe's made up mostly of poor folk who look twice at a sixpence before they spend it; they won't want to put a farthing on the rates for what they can't see the good of. And as long as the water looks all right, they won't believe there's danger in it."

"But the railway will be open in a few months."

"Ay, that's just it, and they're hoping for more trade through visitors. That's the string your husband's got to pull. But ask yourself, how will Challacombe like to have all the world told that it hasn't a decent water supply?"

"They'll not love the man who told, I see that," said Wilmot, slowly.

"And he's your husband," said the captain, quietly.

"And Tony does manage to set people's backs up, too," said Wilmot to herself.

The captain could not gainsay it.

"I will be good, I will, Uncle Dickie," she said penitently. "I've been very selfish, but Tony never said a word to me about this, and he talks so of everything else."

"Isn't that because this is more to him than the other things? He's talked to me often enough of it."

"And I can hinder or help? I'd like that," said Wilmot, "only somehow I never feel I'm any use when I'm there with him."

The interaction of temperament, the most incalculable thing in life: when shall we understand its simplest laws?

"Uncle Dick," she said after a silence, "have you ever killed a man? They say you have."

"Killed a man, my dear," laughed he—"why, dozens of 'em."

"No, I mean really."

"Well, I've done for one, or maybe more, and rid the world of some vermin, too. Look ye here, my dear, don't

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you sit too long on an addled egg like a mazed hen. 'Tis but a little, tiny step from life to death, and the souls we shove deathwards mayn't always owe us a grudge for it. There's some, you know, that the Almighty Himself is the only one who can deal with."

"I killed Archelaus, I suppose, as sure as if I'd pushed him off that cliff."

"And I killed a man in Lima, and another upon the deck of a tramp, and damned glad I did too. Wake up, my dear, I'm none so sure but what there isn't a crowd of people that would ha' been the better of it if they'd started by a real big fall into sin. It would make 'em humble and careful, and put a soul in 'em by which to understand this queer old world, if they should only learn from it that their righteousness will always be filthy rags, whatever other folks' righteousness may be. Ay, ay, I know it hurts sore, and always will, but you've to fight and live."

"Why should it have happened to me? Other women have amused themselves and done no harm. Such a little thing too."

"Of big or little, we're not in a position to judge. But you're not alone. I've never spoken of it for forty years, but back along there was a maid I cared for down in the west. I went and left her . . . and never thought what I left her to."

Wilmot slipped her hand into his.

"When I come back"—the old man dropped into his earlier speech—"they said her'd gone . . . to shame—and never told of the blackguard that sent her there. That cut me sorest, when all her folks shook me by the hand. I've always known since that there's pearls of price down in the deep water of every woman's heart, and I've seen it since in the vilest hag in an opium den."

"Didn't you ever see her again?"

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"Never, though I've searched many a town; and perhaps my child . . . for 'twas a little maid. Ah, my dear, do you thank God your sin's dead."

"I will try, Uncle Dickie."

"There's a brave lass. And maybe, your own little cheeld'll pay for the poor lad that died—maimed before ever he clapt eyes on 'ee."

"Uncle Dick, do you know you've done an awful thing?" said Wilmot, with her eyes hidden. "You've taught me to look for atonement in *that*. And if things shouldn't be right, I shall know that there's no wiping out what I've done."

"Then do something for other people's children, and go back to Challacombe to fight against the numskulls, by the side of the doctor."

"And will it all atone?"

"By the Lord, I believe so," said the captain, raising his hat solemnly.

"Then I'll go back," said Wilmot.

"And I've never had to say a word of Mrs. Rouncevell," said the captain to himself.

The next day found Wilmot at home in Challacombe, prepared to do her duty, as she sombrely told herself. It was, perhaps, hardly the frame of mind in which Dr. Tony would have wished her to return, for the consciously heroic is apt, in daily life, to be rather too bracing for weak human nature.

Yet probably there is no human situation which does not call for the exercise of the heroic spirit, for, truly seen, every corner of life is a battlefield, though it is but seldom that the big drum can be heard in the quiet places where men wrestle unseen by the main army, and where they often doubt if the general's field-glass can pierce so far; or even, as the tide of battle sways, whether there be, indeed, a general at all. Wherein lies, of course, the special danger of quiet corners.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE PLACE OF A STONE

"UGH! you ugly devil," said Dr. Borlace, with a grimace at his own reflection, "she thought you were going to kiss her—and you were, more fool you."

He held in his hand a quaint hand-mirror, set in an oak frame, carved with naked cupids carrying baskets, which a piece of good fortune in the shape of an unexpected cheque had caused him to purchase that morning. Dr. Tony had the buoyancy of temperament which always sees the coming tide of success in a few straws of good luck; and an extra number of half-crowns usually inspired him with a *débonnaire* jollity that filled the house either with weird ornaments, or with the smell of extra-savoury food.

To-night, the cheque, combined with the return of Wilmot, though with a dismal shadow under her eyes, had brought an elation that was, however, just at this moment, on the ebb. He flung the mirror, in disgust, across the room, where it fell against the end of the sofa and cracked right across. The doctor was superstitious enough to be alarmed at the omen, but he was still more vexed at the idea that the noise might awaken Wilmot, who was supposed to be asleep upstairs.

It was somewhere near midnight on the night of his wife's return from the North Coast. Dr. Borlace had been cooking steak for himself; a frying-pan and plates lay stranded on outlying points of the furniture. The doctor prided himself on doing work at odd times, and now, with a very sick mariner, who needed constant visits, on his

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hands, he had further burdened himself with the task of boiling a tongue, which was so large that it required frequent fresh supplies of water, lest it should become uncovered. This self-chosen work had become tedious; moreover, the Urban District Council had met that morning, and the doctor was full of the great question of the new water-supply.

"Cap'en Dickie may be up still," said he to himself, "and he's full of pith if you catch him late enough."

Like many men, Dr. Tony was himself apt to be taciturn at noon, and garrulous at midnight.

Captain Penrice's house stood a few steps down the road; a light still glimmered downstairs, and the doctor soon fetched him out and across the road to undertake the joint work of watching the tongue.

"I've got old Varcoe on my hands with a temperature near Kingdom Come, so I thought I'd get this tongue boiled, as I must sit up anyway," said he, as the two men settled down by the fire.

"With two women in the house, are you obliged to do jobs like that?" asked the captain, with a laugh.

"Don't get a tongue like this warmed through, women don't," said Dr. Tony; "ideas too small for it—and just look at the size of this one. Now, women's minds are made for small things. They wouldn't rise to a thing like this."

Like many philosophers, Dr. Borlace now regarded the tongue, since it had become his, as a glorious, almost Homeric joint, though he had much depreciated its quality before.

"Fall to," said he, waving his hand hospitably towards the table, and setting plates and glasses, "there's Stilton and whisky. It's usually Cheddar and ale with me, but I earned a few fees yesterday with a few damned lies. Wherefore the Stilton and whisky. Odd, isn't it, that all my life, success is the bird I've been trying to put salt on the tail of, and never got her yet."

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"She's a jade you mustn't woo, if you want to win, I've heard say."

"Faith, you're right. And, talking of another kind of wooing, just look here." He held out a portfolio of papers. "Fair copies of proposals, every one. And all refused, by the Lord, only I didn't keep the answers. And yet, every letter I wrote, I said when I'd done it, 'That'll fetch 'em.' But it never did. Now, there's one to a rich widow I stalked all one summer: her heart was in the coffin there with Samuel—or so she said. But it didn't stay there long, for the very next year she was married again—but not to me."

"And then you met my niece," said the captain, wondering whether it was whisky or Wilmot that was making the doctor so expansive.

"And do you know what I said when I got back here after she'd accepted me?" asked the doctor.

"*Nunc dimittis!*" asked Captain Penrice, drawing his grizzled eyebrows together into a mark of interrogation.

"I said, 'Tony, you've done it at last. A fine woman's taken you, and now you can hold up your head.'"

"Ay, that's the *Nunc dimittis*. Not many better moments, except when you've weathered a gale round the Horn."

"And talking of success," said Dr. Borlace, holding a match luxuriously to a fresh pipe, "I've come to grips at last with the Council about the water. It's wigs on the green, and no mistake, too."

"Won't hear of it?" asked Captain Penrice, between long puffs.

"Well, 'tisan't that. For they know they must hear of it. I've made it pretty plain that it's a new supply—or typhoid next hot weather, and the prospects of the town ruined for years as a health place. And look at its chances for that—swept every side by sea-wind."

"Then, what's the hitch, if they know all that?"

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"They know it," said Dr. Borlace, grimly, "because they see pretty well that other folks would soon know it, for we've got a Press in the land, to knock sense even into a place like this. No, that's not the difficulty."

"What, then?"

"The material the pipes are to be made of. The usual thing is iron mains and lead supply pipes, and that won't do here?"

"Why not?"

"Lead pipes are too dangerous with the kind of upland surface water we must tap for the new supply. Oh, I've sent it to be analyzed, and I'm certain I'm right. I've always made a special study of public health questions, you know."

"But what are the special conditions with this water, because it's upland surface water in all these southern towns, after all?"

"See here," said Dr. Tony, leaning forward with tapping forefinger to illustrate his point, "there's very little sulphate of lime in the only water supply we can draw from for Challacombe. Now, sulphate of lime in 'soft' water prevents corrosion of lead, but there isn't enough of it in this water to prevent corrosion of the lead in the pipes. And corroded lead in water is a cumulative poison, of course."

"Result?" queried Captain Penrice.

"Put in lead pipes, and you'll have cases of lead poisoning after they've been in a few months. And there's even a worse point. In this water there's a deal of nitrate of ammonia, and that hastens corrosion."

"Well, then, use iron pipes."

"Difficult to work, and therefore very expensive. And that's the point on which everything turns—cheapness."

"Any other sort usable?"

"Health pipes, perhaps, lined with tin—and expensive too."

"What line do the Council take, then?"

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"Oh, I'm wrong in my chemistry, or rather I'm wrong in what I deduce from it, for they can't say the analyst had any motive to deceive them. Or if I'm not wrong in them, then lead poisoning's healthy."

"What's it like?"

"Pains in the limbs, anæmia, slow poisoning."

"Slow?"

"Oh, very in this form. It mightn't shorten many lives, but it drains the vital forces all the same. And what's the good of bringing in the purest of moor water and running it through poison pipes."

"Lead pipes or typhoid, eh?"

"Then I say it shall be typhoid. We'll have 'health' pipes or none. And what I say I'll stick to. I hate half measures. And after all, lead poisoning can be anything but a joke."

"It's a slight risk you seem to be running with the lead pipes, and a big one with typhoid. Of two evils choose the smaller, they say."

"If all the damned old wives' proverbs had been hanged, drawn, and quartered in the Middle Ages, it would have been a deal easier to live here now," growled the doctor. "Talking of old wives' tales, look at that," said he, taking a photograph from the midst of the fair copies in the portfolio. "Vaccination results," he said, pointing to the leprous child in the photograph. He kept a store of such records in close proximity to the other records of sentiment.

"And yet you have your regular vaccination days," said Captain Penrice, quietly.

"The majority say, 'Vaccinate, or else no Stilton and whisky,' therefore I vaccinate. If you go anywhere on the mind tack in this world, you must juggle a bit with your convictions. The beaten track, that's what you've got to walk in. There's nobody more pedantic than I—in business hours."

"Ay, perhaps so. I've never been on the mind tack

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myself, so I can't say. Good honest wood and iron is good enough for me. If you can drive a rivet straight, you needn't bother about opinions."

"And it's just because I give way everywhere else, that over the pipes I'll do what's my notion of the right—or I'll never hold up my head again."

"Um," said Captain Penrice, "well, I hope you will win, but Challacombe is a small place to show the way where big towns have been satisfied with something less than perfection, for I've never heard of this special point, though we've often heard of new supplies being brought in. Therefore, I suppose they put up with lead."

"Challacombe won't, as long as I'm Medical Officer. I shall resign first," said Dr. Borlace, who really enjoyed feeling himself a very splendid fellow.

No one appreciated his merits more than he. His past career had been one of hard struggle: a poor degree, partly due to his spasmodic style of work, and partly the result of the precious time taken from his own reading to help a friend whose eyesight failed in the last months of degree work, had been followed by a country practice among fisherfolk. He was heavily handicapped also by a disregard of conventionality, which the world only condones in men of extraordinary mastery, and which was even more of a hindrance to him in prim country society than it would have been in the wider air of a city. His eccentricity had, undoubtedly, stood in the way of his success with women, for the doctor had only too often given a farcical appearance to an episode which the woman in question yearned to regard as an idyll.

Varcoe answered to the helm that night, or rather to the blood-letting, for Dr. Borlace regularly bled for fever when his patients were those lusty master mariners amongst whom his practice chiefly lay. For blood-letting, while being cheaper

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than febrifuges, is also, so the doctor maintained, Nature's method, and therefore less likely to be harmful to the life forces.

On his way back from Varcoe the doctor stood watching the yellow reflections cast by the lamps on the oily surface of the tide that lapped against the quay steps. The harbour basin was crowded with the craft by which the town lives. Rising and falling to the swell, the dark hulls rocked, cordage creaked in the night stillness, and all around the great bay outside a ring of shore lights marked the water-edge.

Upwards from the harbour rise the weather-worn houses, roofed and often slated on the walls with old grey Devon slate; the town seems from the hill above like a steaming cauldron of greyness, throwing up vapour in the form of chimney reek. Never a garden space is there, scarcely a green tree, or an ivy-covered wall, for the town is sea-born and lives by the bounty of the water. The hills, too, on which it stands are honeycombed with caves, where the drip of hidden springs still forms on the walls and floors monstrous shapes of stalactites and stalagmites. Wind-swept, for its headland juts into the Channel, much prosperity was to be expected when the new railway should open up the town for health-seekers and start fresh markets for the fish in great cities. The town, whose name is said to be derived from the Hebrew Chalakim, "place of a stone," was just now seething with the excitement of a new railway line and a possible new water supply.

In small, isolated towns the mental atmosphere, being home-made, is simpler in its constituents than the same article in wider, more sophisticated communities. In Challacombe there were but two classes: the fisher people, swayed by the primitive savagery of desire and hate, but dominated, too, by the master virtues of loyalty to kin and tenderness to suffering; and the small tradespeople, less ignorant, but far more enslaved to the baser items of this world's profit and loss.

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But the forces upward and outward towards a wider life than the merely personal were as active here as in national life itself. Of the two roads of expansion, the emotional and the intellectual, the church of St. Peter the Fisherman offered, with its chants and incense and lights, the emotional; and the Methodist chapel, the way of salvation by taking thought. In the church the burly trawlers rolled up the aisles with banners, or knelt, child-like, in front of the symbols of a passionate humility that matched the mystery of the life in themselves that tore their heart-strings at sight of a dying child, or throbbed in their temples before an enemy. For the chanted music knows so well the way man treads that stairway of his passion, up to the heights of love and down to the depths of hate.

The chapel, too, was crowded, but mainly from the shop parlours, where they dread instinctively the emotions that may blight as well as quicken, and seek the ordered righteousness, whose bane is hair-splitting and casuistry. Yet upward and outward, led both chapel and church, by the road of the intellect or the emotion.

To such as these the new ideal brought by Dr. Borlace must needs seem strange, for into the most intimate relations of their life the scientist, humble though he may be in his own field, must bring a new vision of life—the ordered arrangement of the physical under the rule of certain law, a renaissance in miniature. In a word, drains, not incense; dustbins, not conviction of sin—a nineteenth-century reformation, requiring its Luther or its Calvin, or, perhaps preferably, the human tact of a Melanchthon. But if the light-bearer be neither Luther, Calvin, nor Melanchthon?

Suddenly the doctor's eye caught a huddled mass of what he took at first sight to be fishing-tackle, flung down at the bottom of the steps. Yet it is an extraordinarily clumsy fisherman who throws his gear about in that fashion, and



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Dr. Borlace, stepping hastily down, bent over the dark mass. It was the body of a man asleep. Lighting a match, the doctor looked closer; across the jersey was embroidered the word "Blaane," which appeared to be Norwegian, and by the side of the man lay an empty bottle. But Dr. Tony had noticed something further, for hastily dropping the match, he stood for a second, seeing reflected in the water the hideous growth on the man's face. "Smallpox," said he to himself, "and the crew have turned him adrift with a bottle. He's been rowed in to-night, and his ship is far enough off by this time."

The doctor was tired, and the workhouse isolation hut stood at the top of the hill, but there was no help for it. Up the road he dragged the man, after arousing him with difficulty, and then spent a good half-hour jangling and clashing the workhouse bell.

Some time later Wilmot was aroused for the third time that night by the scraping of boots on the cockle-shells of the path below her window, as the doctor returned home. This time rage possessed her at the disturbance of her rest, and she hurried down to expostulate. For a moment she stood watching him, herself unseen.

Alas! for anti-vaccination principles: the lymph was handy, the arm hung by Dr. Borlace's side, and grim fear lurked in the recesses of his person.

Wilmot turned and went upstairs again without a word: he had just vaccinated himself, though she knew he professed disbelief in it. But Tony never really knew his own mind, she told herself, with nose in air.

It remains to be said that Dr. Borlace's arm "took" capitally, and the Norwegian sailor's case turned out to have been wrongly diagnosed. Wilmot noted, too, that the photographs of "vaccination results" appeared from amongst the fair copies of proposals to be published by our little weaknesses do in derision.

## CHAPTER X

### FEMINA FURENS

It is only a mean hound of a captain who refuses to stand by when he has run a boat down. After pondering this fact for a while, Captain Penrice considered it to be plainly his duty to visit Mrs. Rouncevell.

"Everything's nothing," said he, preparing for the journey to St. Piran's, "when you come to grasp it. The worst snorter that a wind-jammer ever weathered was naught to a man's fancy of it."

No one is more consciously philosophical than the man who knows his cucumber is going to be very bitter.

Mrs. Rouncevell was more gaunt than ever, and her dress shabby even to the unobservant eyes of the old ship-builder, though the room was polished to the point of sparkle. The tyranny of furniture, in fact, possessed her, and she spent her empty days sweeping, cleaning, and turning out cupboards. She lived completely alone, for Tryphena had been dismissed, and the passion of parsimony had taken, as often happens in lonely women's lives, the place of all the higher impulses of self-gratification. The fields of St. Piran's had been let, and only the garden remained to her. This she cultivated with her own hands, getting her most pleasurable sensation from the fact that its produce, with the eggs of a few hens, almost supported her, for the hoarding instinct, which is not the same as the gaining one, had the upper hand now. She would not, indeed, have speculated with her money, even though she had been assured that it would

breed rapidly. A few pennies saved by self-denial gave more joy than ten per cent., so that it was a pleasure to live on blackberries and mushrooms that cost nothing, and to know that her store of apples and potatoes would serve to keep her alive through the winter.

"Mrs. Rouncevell," said the captain, devoutly wishing himself elsewhere, "you know who I am, I think. My niece couldn't make up her mind to come and see you, and I felt you couldn't be left entirely alone by all our family—after what happened in the summer. So here I am."

Inwardly Mrs. Rouncevell was palpitating with anxiety lest her secret had been discovered, for she had steadily for months been keeping to herself the knowledge that Archelaus was alive, though she could not have clearly given her reasons for so doing. She shrank always from the conscious knowledge of her own reasons for any action. Archelaus had, therefore, been directed to address all his letters to the care of her sister, and under a Midland postmark they always reached her at Bottreaux, for Canadian postmarks might have caused gossip in the village.

"It was you," she said, "who brought up Wilmot Borlace. But I don't see what there can be between us now."

"Oh, my dear soul," said Captain Penrice, dropping all pretence of formality, "there isn't anything my little girl wouldn't give to undo the past. It'll be a shadow on her all her days, the mischief she did—innocently, as I believe; thoughtlessly, I know."

"Wantonly's truer, Captain Penrice, since it's naming things you're after."

She stood up and leaned, trembling, on the table that stood between them.

"And if it's a shadow to her, just ask yourself what it is to me to have him gone. It's worst when I open up the

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house of a morning, and there's all the hours before me to fill with—nothing. Night-times it's not so bad, for I sleep long and heavy, thank God."

"I know, I know," said the captain, miserably; "but couldn't you send my little maid a kind word or two. She didn't mean it, you see—not what it came to."

"She did, Captain Penrice, for she sat in that very chair while I warned her what it would all come to."

"Can't 'ee forgive her, my dear soul? For she's just a young wife, and mother soon to be, and tender-like, you see, and it weighs heavy, though she doesn't say much. For all that, it's mortal heavy."

"A young wife, and mother soon to be,"—the words echoed in the older woman's heart, and decided her. Never would she tell the truth about Archelaus while keeping it secret added any pang to this happy woman's lot. She hugged herself in her loneliness that fortune still should give her a hold over this woman who would soon have everything that she herself was denied.

"Wait a bit," she said, as if Captain Penrice's fatal words had moved her. "You shall take her something from me to show that I bear——"

But Mrs. Rouncevell could not finish the sentence. She dragged herself upstairs, and he heard her moving about in the room above; the captain, as he listened, was conscious of swimming in deeper waters than his masculine plummet could sound. She returned in a moment, bearing a parcel wrapped in tissue paper; it was a little red velvet cap which she uncovered.

"Take it to her. I can see her now," she said, "as plainly as possible, putting it on and looking up under her eyes, the way she knows how."

The bewildered captain took the parcel, as though it were, in fact, the shirt of Nessus.

"And," concluded Mrs. Rouncevell, "when the child comes, she'll maybe know more than she does now. For she'll know then that if the Lord puts off the day of reckoning time and again, it's compound interest He'll ask for. Not that I wish her evil, for I've no need."

As he went Mrs. Rouncevell blew out one of the two candles that stood lighted on the mantelpiece, saying to herself, even in that moment of bitterness, "'Two candles burning, no plough going, that's ruination,' my old father used to say."

Then she placed the other on a chair in the firelight, and by the faint light opened her Bible at the passage: "He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and be a joyful mother of children."

Slowly, with bitter heart, she read, and then sat watching the falling of the ashes on the hearth, appealing in wordless fashion to those powers beyond the human on whom man has always called to redress the balance of wrong created by his own ill-doing. For in secret, sullen ways the weak have always fought the strong, woman against man, burgess against noble, by appeals to the twilight region of the unknown powers of the soul. Had Mrs. Rouncevell lived in the Middle Ages she would doubtless have been fashioning a waxen image of her enemy in a red cap.

As it was she fell asleep and dreamt that a rounded, fluffy baby-head lay in the crook of her own arm. She woke later to the starveling satisfaction of a supper that had cost the fraction of a penny.

All the time Archelaus was fighting his way out in the Far West of Canada. He always wrote cheerfully, though the lack of money from home had driven him to work that left little time for painting. That evening he so profited by his mother's half-repentance that he received twenty pounds from her in her next letter, though she had hitherto

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refused him a penny of remittance, "to be spent on sin." For at moments it seemed to her that she would have been happier had he been really beyond her reach—and so beyond the power of the temptations of this world.

But she felt it was but written down after all, for Mrs. Rouncevell was not far enough removed from the peasant to escape fatalism, which is, in fact, a special heritage of the North Coast, since nowhere in England does man live more at the mercy of the great winds that strew the shore with wreckage in defiance of all man's puny precautions.

Captain Penrice had not recovered from this visit even by the next morning, but the beat of the hammers in his yard was like the swell of a sea-wind in a Viking's nostrils. He flung off coat and waistcoat and wielded a mighty hammer by the side of the men who were roosting on a plank outside the ribs of a skeleton trawler. Never did the boys have to look slicker than that morning.

When it was over, and every one in the yard had drawn a breath of relief, the captain sought the pump in his back kitchen, and commanded his "man," William, to pump. William pumped zestfully on the back of his master.

"Phew!" said the captain, emerging at last from the shower-bath. "That's better. There's moments yet for all the blasted old women in creation . . . and all the young ones too. Boy," he roared, "where's that pie? And if you haven't cooked the potatoes through, I'll skin you. Every heart was as hard as iron yesterday."

Wilmot found him puffing away at "Smelly Jane," an ancient meerscham, when she came in an hour later. The vigorous sound of William sluicing dishes filled the little house.

"Here's another," groaned Captain Penrice to himself.

"Well?" said Wilmot, perching herself on his knee as a preliminary to removing her hat-pins. "What did Mrs. Rouncevell say?"

"Say?" growled he. "What she might have been expected to say."

"Was she awful?" asked Wilmot, as she stooped forward to fold out the frown between his eyes. Playfulness was a mask.

"Pretty fair in awfulness, but she said she didn't bear you any grudge," said he, with an inward frown at the necessity for expurgation.

"That's a lie, anyway," said Wilmot. "You oughtn't to have gone, Uncle Dickie, for it did no good, and it's upset you. I can see that. It isn't as if we could do her any good."

"She sent you this," said the captain, reaching out his hand to a side table, and watching his niece curiously as she opened the parcel.

"How extraordinary!" said Wilmot, turning the red cap over curiously. "It's beautifully made, too."

Then she perched it on her head and looked at him, with a little smile at her own folly. Suddenly the captain understood why it had been given. Snatching it off roughly, he flung it into the heart of the fire. He knew the picture Mrs. Rouncevell saw when she made that cap—the imp of mischief that, as she thought, had loved to destroy. Wilmot covered her face with her hands.

"Uncle Dickie, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But, indeed, I never meant to act lightly."

"And she, too, poor thing," he said, "she lives but to save, though they tell me she's well off. Every farthing she looks at twice."

"Don't," said Wilmot; "it'll seem to me soon that I've taken her soul too."

"Look here, Wilmot," said he, turning at last, "I'm not a darned sky-pilot, and I won't have any more of this talk. I always wondered why they were such half-baked chaps.

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Now I know why. What they must have to go through, with this sin and that sin to gabble over! Don't you say another word. It's bad for you, and it's infernal bad for me.

"Boy," he called, standing her up on the ground as though she were a child, and opening the door to bawl into the passage, "where's that cherry brandy? Stop that swabbing up and bring it here. D'ye hear?"

The sound of many waters ceased, and William appeared with glasses and the required stimulant.

"You're not going," said William, "to put cherry brandy 'pon top of cider, I should hope. You'd a quart of that to dinner, if you'd a mouthful. You'll be roarin' like a bull to-morrow with the gout."

The captain paid no heed. "Here, you drink that," he said, handing a glass to Wilmot. "You're a regular cold little snipe, I can feel. How's the doctor?" he growled, sinking back into his chair when the boy had gone.

Wilmot noticed that he took William's warning, and that the cherry brandy remained untouched. Wise and worthy William!

"Oh, he's all right. His tastes in reading do amuse me." She laughed a little.

"I know. Crabbe, Rabelais—I know," nodded the old man.

"And Lucretius; we are going to make a translation of him this winter, and it's to bring in filthy lucre, Uncle Dickie. Think of that," she said, finishing her liqueur.

Uncle Dickie was seized with a fearful paroxysm of inward laughter.

"Don't," said Wilmot, seizing on his coat-fronts and trying to shake him. "Don't; you look like a crab in a fit. Whatever is it?"



Captain Dickie desisted. "I was only thinking, my dear, of that unlucky child. Rabelais, Crabbe, and Lucretius to the makin' of 'em. O Lord, O Lord, whatever will he be like? I'd better come along, and we'll read Ford or Webster—the 'Broken Heart,' now, or the 'Duchess of Malfi.' What do you say to that? Good Lord, what a brain he'll have!"

Wilmot flushed pink, and hid her face on his shoulder. "Uncle Dickie," she said, "you don't think what happened to Archelaus will hurt . . . him?"

"Devil a bit," said Uncle Dickie, boldly. "Not if you'm a brave little maid."

But she was gazing at his shoulder fixedly. "Dickie," she said, "you're a bad old man. What's this on your shoulder?" She held up for his inspection a long white hair—a woman's hair. "Where did you get this, Uncle Dickie? Where have you been?"

"I'll swear," said Captain Penrice . . . "I've never——"

"No, don't," she said laughingly, coiling it round her finger-tip. Noticing the thickness of it, "Oh," she cried suddenly . . . "why, Mrs. Rouncevell has white hair." She got up and flung the thing violently into the fire. "Shall we never, never escape from that woman?"

"She's not been in my arms, if that's what you mean," said Captain Penrice, brutally. "I don't know where I got the darned thing."

"No," said Wilmot, bitterly, "I don't suppose you do. But it coiled like a live thing round my finger."

She hurried from the room, and Captain Penrice heard her asking William for a bowl of water. Then she went, calling out a good-bye as she banged the door behind her.

"Can I go out to-night, when you've had yer tea?" said William, putting his head in at the door. The air was thick with incense from "Smelly Jane," and he blinked.

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"No, you can't," snapped the captain. "I'm going out myself."

But William was not to be balked. That night Captain Penrice, on his return home, found a rope hanging from the lad's window, whereupon he walked up to the room and found, as he had expected, no William.

Wasting no words, Captain Penrice was at pains to remove the rope before locking up and retiring. Changing his mind, he ransacked in the rear of the house, found a barrel of tar, carefully steeped the rope in the tar, and replaced it in William's window. Next morning, as he saw the lad's hands and breeches looking pretty blackish, he suddenly became melodious—humming under his breath an apposite little Elizabethan catch—

"But we none of us cared for Kate—for Kate,  
For she loved not the savour of pitch nor of tar ;  
Then to sea, boys, and let her go hang—go hang."

"Your best sheet's ruined," said William, answering indirectly.

"Why?" snapped the captain.

"Didn't wash yer hands when you went to bed last night. Tarded all over," said William, simply. "Laughed the wrong side of his face," said he, making a grimace outside the door, "the old fool."

But the captain continued, in the intervals of tea-drinking—

"None of us cared for Kate—for Kate."

Now, William walked with Kate.

## CHAPTER XI

ROSEMARY AND RUE

"Ah," said Dr. Borlace, "you're admiring my door. All my own work, I assure you, and I use a new medium invented by myself."

The door in question was painted in huge red poppies and dark-blue cornflowers.

"I want colour about me, always have," he continued. "If Nature had only known what she was about, she'd have given me ruddy locks."

Miss Dorothy Penaluna was paying a morning call at Dashpers on the doctor and his wife. They sat in the consulting-room, a friendly room, dappled by the shadows thrown by the trees across the road; there were pipes everywhere, books everywhere, perhaps chiefly on the floor. Diogenes, purringly stretching cosy limbs in the window-seat, genially invited every one to be at home, as he was himself. The doctor's cat now possessed the freedom of Challacombe, and courted every lady cat for a square mile round, without let or hindrance from any man, since Dr. Borlace had dusted the jackets of several boys for trying to stone the creature.

"But you didn't come to talk about the colour of my hair," said he. "You wanted to ask me something. What is it?"

"There's a child," said Miss Penaluna, "I'm anxious about, and I didn't know any one else to whom I could go. There's the master of the Board School, of course."

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"Wall-eyed: no use. I know the chap. Born in blinkers. Well?"

"The children are left in the hands of a step-mother, and the boy is now fourteen, though he looks like eight. He is so thin, that when he is sent out to sell baskets of vegetables, his legs seem to give under him."

"Rickets. Starved."

"I'm afraid so, and he's growing half-witted under ill-treatment, for if he does not sell the vegetables he goes without food."

"Known about it long?"

"I'm afraid I have, but I thought I could do something by myself."

"Why didn't you come before? The inspector was down here last week, but he must come again, that's all. Give me the name and address, then I can overhaul the boy first."

He took both on his shirt cuff, explaining that if he wrote things on scraps of paper they were bound to get lost. Shirts one didn't lose so easily.

"I'm the scavenger of this little hole," he explained, cheerfully. "I mean to clean it up before I go hence."

"Have you heard the latest story of Tony's adventures?" interposed Wilmot. "He has been having quite an active time lately."

It really seemed to Wilmot that the effort to regard her husband from the heroic point of view was going to be successful. Challacombe objected strongly to inspectors of cruelty cases, to post-mortems in the case of suspicious deaths, and more especially to any interference with its right to continue dirty.

"It really was touch-and-go for a minute or two," said Dr. Borlace, enjoying his inward vision of a hot moment that had in reality been uncommonly unpleasant. "You see, down here at Challacombe, a post-mortem to ascertain

cause of death is ghoulish. I'm a ghoul, therefore, for last week I'd a fishy case in Susan Tall's child, and I wouldn't give a certificate till I knew more about it. The story got about, and a howling mob of women gathered outside, and smashed all the windows."

"And Tony had to escape by the back door, guarded by two policemen," finished the proud wife. "They've never forgiven him here for the babies' bottles he breaks."

"Long filthy indiarubber tubes, not cleaned since the days of Noah, poison every drop of milk the little beggars drink. Taken very bad; gripes sent by the Almighty. That's the course of 'infantile diseases' down here, madam. Yah, don't I know 'em, the hussies."

"But," said Miss Dorothy, "aren't they afraid to let you know all this?"

"Oh, they always gossip to Tony," laughed Wilmot.

"I'm no oyster, and I like it," he confessed; "and my own language isn't Parliamentary, so I get good Saxon English sometimes from 'em, which I like, for your pedantic stuff is all high-cockolorum. Talking of language, you come and see our lending library. You ought to join. Four shillings a quarter, and I don't embezzle the funds."

They followed him through the surgery into a drab room, fitted with deal shelves partly filled with books.

"I bring art in one hand—to the tabbies," he said, ignoring the fact that Miss Penaluna herself might be counted a tabby, "and cleanliness in the other—to the hussies. I'm going up now to preach that last in the Devil's Acre up yonder."

"That means the workhouse, you know," said Wilmot, enjoying Miss Penaluna's flutter.

"Oh," said Dr. Borlace, "Miss Penaluna knows the difference between a peascod and a pea. Some don't. Now, if I talked less plain English, I should have a bigger

## 94      The Wingless Victory

practice. As it is, I've been called in only once at the big house—not the Devil's Acre, you know, that's always with me—but at *the* big house—to see the footman.”

Here he was, grudging and envying like a mean, hungry mortal, and Miss Penaluna watching him with wondering eyes. Wilmot hated to see it.

“We're not looking at the library,” she said; “here they are, old giants and new. And we've a literary society, and Tony proposes to lecture them on Rabelais. Rabelais, for tabbies, you know!”

“Rabelais isn't ladylike, is he?” said Miss Dorothy, with rather a bewildered smile.

“Well,” said the doctor, “I'm not expected to be ladylike. They put up with my ways, do the tabbies, for when they come here to change books they consult me in the passage about their qualms—physical ones, I mean. Now, if they came into the consulting-room I should charge them half a crown or three and six. Saves, do you see? And I tell 'em a few tall tales in the passage. They've gone home to apply some rum remedies in their time, poor old dears. From the passage, and not from the consulting-room, mind you. I pay them back for their economy, you see.”

“I shall know, then, what to expect when I ask you in the passage.”

“Ah,” said Wilmot, “but you're not a tabby, you see.”

“And,” said he, “the books are half of 'em improper, and they call to tell me they know it's so, for they've read the book in question three times to make sure.”

He left the two women to return to the consulting-room, the fire, and Diogenes.

“He's all alive, not a thing in a starch coffin, like most of us,” said Miss Penaluna, sinking into a bamboo chair and stroking Diogenes. “You're both of you not afraid to say what you really feel. Somehow it seems so strange to me.

I have lived for so long with people who only say what they think they ought to."

Dorothy Penaluna was a woman of forty-five, but her face, with its wide brow, wondering grey eyes, and wistfully quivering lips, remained virginal, in spite of the grey hair round her temples, and this not from unintelligence, but from that onlooking habit of mind into which English provincial life had forced her. She had only watched others out in the hot noontide of life. The gleam in a man's eyes, the wandering touch of baby hands, these were wonderful things to Dorothy Penaluna still, wonderful, unknown, and for other women. To-day she was forty-five, and if thirty-five be the knell of youth to a woman, forty-five is the first falling of the shadow of age. This fact, and the unusual frankness of the Dashpers household, had moved her outside the starched limits of her everyday life.

"You see," she said, feeling Wilmot's comprehending eyes on her, "I'm really a tabby, too—like those your husband laughs at. I've never, somehow, been able to live as I like, and now I don't even seem to be able to think as I like. I've always had to live somebody else's life—mother's and my sister's. And now they're both dead, and I'm too old to do anything I'd planned to do, when I was young. You see, I never could do it then, for they were both frail and they wanted me."

It was the old tragedy of middle-age that has no "situations," and knows nothing of melodrama, but has sacrificed its zest of life, not to the forward-looking service of child-bearing and rearing, but to the backward-looking care of the past generations. For, between the service of the withering fruit and the ripening, woman's life is passed; whence, indeed, her small show of produce in the market-places of the world.

"This is Latin, isn't it?" she said, taking up a volume of

## 96      The Wingless Victory

Lucretius which lay open. "I tried to learn Latin and joined a class two years ago, but they all learnt so much more quickly than I—the younger ones, I mean—that I was ashamed to go on. I suppose I had lost the brains to pick up the words quickly."

There was a Latin Primer at home, blistered with tears at a page of "Verb Parts." Miss Dorothy knew how to conjugate "fero, tuli, latum" uncommonly well.

Wilmot leaning forward, chin on palm, watched her with bright eyes. She understood so well the sense of futile waste which Miss Penaluna was trying to express. To know one's self a part in the great procession of life one must at least feel, not only that one is doing something that our fellows need done, but that one has nerves and brain and blood to do it. Miss Dorothy was in the first stage of the snow sleep of life.

Suddenly Wilmot jumped up, and putting her hands on the older woman's shoulders, shook her slightly to and fro.

"Fight it," she said; "you can if you will. Go and sit down in front of your glass and look at yourself. See what you are and what you might be. Go through it all: slack cheeks, tired eyes, all the rest of it. And then tell yourself that many women are more charming than ever."

"Ay, but they know how to live."

"Then learn it."

Miss Penaluna sat up. Wilmot's quick reading of her thoughts was an unspeakable relief to the poor soul who had scarcely ever said a word that mattered to any one for years. For woman's talk to woman is but too often tinkling brass or sounding cymbal.

"At my age?"

"Gracious, yes. Massage your face. I'll show you how. Pull up the blinds, let in the sun, live outdoors. Wear a pretty dress and the colour that suits you every



day. Smoke cigarettes, say damn, and look up under your drooped eyelids."

Wilmot illustrated.

"My dear, my dear," protested Miss Dorothy, not really shocked, but with a delightful glow at the possibilities of life.

"You know it would do you powers of good. For it isn't Latin grammar you really care about, though I'll teach you that fast enough, if you like. It's life you want. To see somebody smile because you are coming, and to know that anyway you don't add to the drabness of this world."

"That's true enough," said Miss Penaluna; "I used to think it waste when one lived through the summer evenings all alone. Why, I've stood outside lighted windows and listened to the young things singing, and I've envied the servant girl her young man."

"You dear thing," cooed Wilmot, planting determined red lips on Miss Penaluna's. "There," she said, "now you know how to kiss, anyway."

Miss Dorothy's breast actually heaved with the turmoil of new thoughts, and her temples thumped with excited life-blood. There was not a soul in Challacombe who would not have either mocked or scoffed at her. At least, so she fancied, in her prim little pacing of the narrow path.

Then she laughed weakly, wiping away a tear or two. "But I've done something," she said; "I bought a barrel of beer yesterday."

"Good," Wilmot chuckled, "and drink it regularly, even for tea. I should have steak for breakfast too, if I were you. 'The red blood gleams in the winter's pale,'" she hummed to herself.

"I bought it for Prowse," said Miss Penaluna, laughing; "he's my jobbing gardener, and I overheard him yesterday from my bedroom window saying to himself: 'It's Prowse do this, and it's Prowse, do that, but it's never Prowse, be 'ee

## 98      The Wingless Victory

dry?' You see, I've never lived with a man about, so I really don't know how to treat them. Then he said: 'Your maiden ladies be all very well in their way, but give me a good family woman to know what's what in the way of victuals!' And I don't know but what he's right. Mother lived upon arrowroot and milk stuff, and I accommodated myself to her."

"Miss Penaluna, what was the most rakish thing you ever did—the rollickingest thing, you know?"

Miss Dorothy considered. "I bought a pot of daisies—red garden daisies, that weren't really needed," she said, "once. I'd threepence over from the marketing money, and a boy passed me with wallflowers in his cap and swayed to the concertina. There was a thrush gurgling in a bush, and . . ."

"The somer was a-coming in," said Wilmot, "I know, I know."

"You see," said Miss Penaluna, painfully searching the records of memory, "there wasn't any theatre, and if there had been, threepence wouldn't have taken me there, and I couldn't be out so late."

"Miss Penaluna, you're going yachting to-day," said Wilmot, decisively. "Uncle Dickie's going to sail us over to Regiswear, and you're going with us. Now, then," she said vigorously, "let's go and look out what you're going to wear—blue serge, white veil. I'm coming to see what you've got."

Miss Penaluna's wardrobe ten minutes later was being turned out by quick fingers that never rumbled or crushed, though they seemed so heedless. Her little maid was astonished to receive an order to have a meal ready by twelve instead of the usual one o'clock, and retired to the kitchen to grapple with the changing universe. For only yesterday missus had changed the day for turning out the spare room from Tuesday to Wednesday, an upheaval of

## Rosemary and Rue 99

the domestic routine that Mrs. Penaluna would never have supported.

Later in the day the sunrays caught the grey castles that face one another at the "Narrows" of the Dart, where of old the ancient seaport repelled invaders by a chain across the river. A misty amethystine shimmer brooded over the hills, and the red-brown of the bracken on the cliffs gleamed with the sparkling points of light as Captain Penrice's sailing-yacht, her sails "barked" red-brown like a trawler's, stole between the ancient seaward-looking towers.

"Ay," said Captain Penrice, "this old river's seen a deal of life. Crusaders, sea-robbers, Norsemen, merchant princes, they all knew the 'Narrows.'"

"To the conquest of the world," said Wilmot, with a thrill in her voice, "our forefathers sailed through here—Raleigh, Davis, Gilbert, to the Pacific Seas and the Arctic wastes. There oughtn't to be any dead here," she said, pointing to the churchyard that hangs on the hillside against the church; "it's the quick, not the dead, we think of here. All the splendour and the pride of things, these are the memories at the 'Narrows,' where real live men went to their great deeds."

There was something cruel in the inflection of her full voice. The pagan scorn of the other side of things hurt both her listeners. Miss Penaluna thought pitifully of her own life of arrowroot, milk puddings and patience.

"It's quick, bright things that come soonest to destruction, you know, child," said the captain.

"Then don't let us think of that, never talk of it, or look at it. Look," she said, pointing to the winding paths on the opposite bank, "there under the pines there grow white lilacs, gorse, and tropic plants side by side, and the cuckoo sings in spring over the humming of the bees in the lilac bushes. That for the years that are, and the kingly names for the years that are gone."

## 100 The Wingless Victory

"Robbers, those kingly men, robbers, child," said Captain Penrice.

"But robbers who robbed for a nation and fed off gold plate, Uncle Dickie."

"And none the better for that," growled he. Just then they were nearing a ketch-rigged boat with white sails. "A Frenchie," he said, "come over with mullet to exchange with our men for ray. There's not so much of that as there used to be, though 'tis but ten hours, with a fair wind, to Cherbourg. The steam-capstans seem to have taken all the grit out of our folks."

The steam-capstan, which had at that time been recently introduced on the trawling-boats, reduces the work of drawing up the trawl to about twenty minutes instead of over an hour.

"Why, over to Challacombe, I've seen Roscoff pebbles as plentiful as you may further west; but the lads liked a bit of a spree in the good old times. They're half-baked, slack toads now."

"Roscoff pebbles" are stones which have a round hole through them: through this the strap passed that joined two kegs together, the stone being used to prevent friction in passing smuggled liquor up cliff-side, and on mules' backs on the journey inland.

Wilmot and Miss Penaluna laughed, for they followed the captain's thought: for all his scorn of Elizabethan robbers, he liked a "bit of a spree," and deeply regretted the passing of the smuggling days, when a journey to Roscoff on the French coast was always to be had for a lad who wanted adventure.

When the captain, helping William with the sails, was out of earshot, Miss Penaluna protested in her mild way to Wilmot.

"You frighten me," she said, "for you want to have everything without pain and shadow. Perhaps we talked all wrong this morning. I'm not sure that we didn't."

## Rosemary and Rue 101

"I hate everything maimed. I had a dog once that broke its leg, but I wouldn't keep it. I had it sent away, after it had been set, to some one who didn't mind. That's why sometimes I can't bear Tony's work. Always touching sick things."

"But to heal?"

"They ought to be put out of sight. I love perfect things. Do you know, I like to be lightly dressed, to feel the sun strike through to my body, to feel it sun-warmed, and know how sweet it is."

Miss Penaluna shivered, but Wilmot was scarcely conscious of speaking to any one but herself.

"And my child must be perfect," she said, "with round limbs that I can pass my hands over like a sculptor over his statue. Must, must, must," she said low to herself, as if in appeal to the hidden forces that make the earth children.

Miss Penaluna put a fluttering hand into the captain's as he helped her up the landing steps. He read her look rightly enough, though he had not heard Wilmot's whispered words.

"A mighty queer maid, that of ours," he said, "but a little soul that God didn't leave out of count when he made her, for all the queerness. We've to stand by her, all of us, Miss Dorothy."

Miss Penaluna forgot her sense of decorum altogether in the sweetness of finding herself coupled with the old man in so human a task.

"So we will, Captain Dickie," she said.

"Then let's shake hands on it, Miss Dorothy," he said, suiting the action to the word, while Wilmot watched them from her cushions with rallying eyes, too far off to hear their low words, and putting her own mischievous interpretations on their doings. "You don't mind my calling you Miss Dorothy," he said, "for I'd a sister called Dorothy, and it comes slick to the tongue somehow."

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Lying alone, save for William, among the boat cushions Wilmot watched the light fade over Regiswear, once the city of bygone merchant princes and of adventurers, more kingly still. Scornfully she compared with it the sordid struggle of Challacombe; in that place of a stone there were no "quick, bright things," only the age-long gaining of a little food for generations of greedy mouths that ate—and died. And her life too, as was Tony's, would soon be merged in drab acquiescence.

At the thought her nerves thrilled, as they do in a moment of dangerous choice. For her child should be quick with the wrestling spirit of a noble nature, if she could give it him. The vital energy that is the driving force of character should raise him, at least, above his mother's folly, his father's poverty of spirit. She would be strong-willed for him, strong in the midst of pettiness. Born in struggle, he should throw the world, for would he not be like Michael Angelo, born among the stone quarries; like Napoleon, conceived in the trenches. The small disciple of Lamarck felt the world-force hers, for the moment. Against a background of grey sky, in the roar of the north wind, she would bear a master spirit.

But Miss Penaluna felt herself a woman of the world when she had returned from her yachting expedition; wherefore she sternly ordered her maid Susan to remove from her sitting-room the garments that had been put to air on chair-backs; for in that household of women, night-dresses sometimes invaded the sitting-rooms; but now it even seemed possible that Captain Penrice might come to see her. She flushed pink at the temerity of her thought, however; for in Challacombe many strict ladies avoided even express trains as indelicate, since so many men travel by them.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE COURT OF THE GENTILES

"It's come, miss, it's come," panted Susan, bursting suddenly into Miss Penaluna's drawing-room, where she was sitting with Wilmot, a few days later. "Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon. I didn't know you'd company," she finished.

"I'm not company," said Wilmot; "and I want to know what's come quite as much as Miss Penaluna does."

The post arrived late in the mornings in Challacombe in days before the advent of the railway. Miss Dorothy's maid, Susan, had a stolid face, all broken up to-day like the water of a placid estuary before the rush of the incoming tide.

"He've written," said she, her big-boned stays creaking audibly with the stress of the heart beneath, "and I never thought to see it. No, never, though I've been down on my knees for it night after night."

Susan's romance had come to her in the Regiswear Cottage Hospital, which she had visited the year before with an attack of pneumonia. There was a simple-hearted eagerness to be helpful in her, which led the nurses to allow her, when she became convalescent, to fetch and carry in the wards. In the men's ward there lay her fate. He saw, he promised, he conquered, and left, promising to make a home for Susan. For some months nothing had been heard of him, and the girl had been growing dingier and dingier as the hopes went.

"I'm very glad," said Miss Penaluna, "for you. But what does he say?"

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"He's been made foreman, and 'tis thirty shillen a week, and there'll be fowls and a pig, and maybe two."

"And you're to marry him soon?" said she, thinking of the troubles before herself.

"So soon as ever we can be ready," said Susan, with a gulp; "and he's getting strong, and never touches a drop and won't. So I shall give 'en egg and milk to keep up his strength. He can always have that."

This thought calmed her considerably.

"And," said Miss Penaluna, with a pretty flush that became her vastly, for life was getting quite exciting, "you're going to be very happy?"

"Why, miss, there'll be a pig, and perhaps two."

This evidently settled the question of happiness.

"And," questioned Wilmot, "does he love you ever so?"

"Augh, miss," snapped Susan, "he ain't the sort to tell up old trade like that. He up and says better; he says, 'I'll marry 'ee, Susan.' That's the sort of chap for my money"—the little maid knew the world,—"and I've got enough money saved to buy a coat and tail ready made," she finished, creaking away after this final pæan of joy.

"So," laughed Wilmot, leaning back with her head in her hand, "Susan's left the court of the Gentiles for ever." The only round curves left in her face, one saw then, were those of the chin and of the upper lip, which pouted above the lower; struggle had made its mark on her face, apart from the pallor of it. "You know, Uncle Dickie always says that most people live outside the real things they want—in the outer court, you know, like the Gentiles. And getting old is acquiescing in the outer court, I suppose, and never trying to be a Jew and getting to the inner one. Susan's evidently going to say good-bye to her outer court soon; she's going inside. Tell me, Miss Penaluna, did you ever try to get into the innermost heart of what you wanted,



## The Court of the Gentiles 105

or are you like the rest of us women—never quite sure what it is that you do want?”

“I think,” said Miss Penaluna, her fingers quivering among the wools she was trying to sort, “I was taught to wait for it, and not to expect it too much either, for fear it should never come.”

“That’s cowardly,” said Wilmot, decisively; “but I’ve been just as bad, for I used to make up my mind what I’d *do*. ‘Career’ was the master word to me once. I’d get inside, I thought, to the doing of big things some time. I wouldn’t live myself in the court of the Gentiles for ever, and I used to say the ‘myself’ with the vigour of a *moi-même* from Louis Quatorze. Heigh-ho! quaint beings, aren’t we? And now I dispense—all wrong, Tony says, and I was going to ‘be’ this and that.”

“I thought only men talked of ‘being’ things,” said Miss Penaluna. “For girls, it’s enough to be without talking about it.”

“Just so, Miss Penaluna, girls *are*—things to suckle fools and chronicle small beer.”

“The truth put indelicately,” said Miss Penaluna, firmly.

“Never mind, it’s only Shakespeare, and he’s an indelicate old party at the best, is the ‘Immortal Swan.’”

“Don’t you think the inner court,” said Miss Penaluna, “is always the same for women, and the other things—careers and doing things—are the court of the Gentiles, though they don’t all think so?”

She flushed in her quaint old-world way, hotly, painfully, even though she was speaking to an intimate friend.

“Men, you mean,” said Wilmot, uncompromisingly, “and lovers.”

“In my day,” said Miss Penaluna, with a flash of laughter, “we called them ‘idle fancies.’ And we pretended blindness on the approach of ‘one in whom we were

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interested.' And in no case, even in a city of the dead, would we have pursued a Man."

"Openly," interjected Wilmot. "And you slept with things under your pillows, didn't you? How funny it all sounds!"

"And one loses the idle fancies," said Miss Penaluna, "as the wrinkles come."

"Does one? Does one?" said Wilmot, leaning forward and catching Miss Penaluna's hands wherewith to shake her. "You know better," she laughed; "you're fuller than ever you were of 'idle fancies,' or the capacity for them, only you've been brought up to behave prettily. And you wouldn't have wrinkles, if you'd persevere with what I told you."

"My dear," sighed Miss Penaluna, "I couldn't stand the cream diet."

Mrs. Penaluna had believed in cream for the complexion; her prescription of such was still a purgatorial memory to her daughter.

"It wasn't cream at all, as you know very well, that I prescribed."

"It isn't lack of cream, my dear, that keeps us women in the outer court of life."

"No," said Wilmot, rising and stretching, "it's small means and narrow opportunities of friendship—the little foxes that are responsible for the poverty of women's harvests. What choice has a woman ever offered to her? She must be thankful if she once gets a chance of any sort of man—and they call that choice. And if she takes him, she has to pretend she has reached the inner court, because she can look through the gratings from the court of the Gentiles and see him—doing what he wants to do."

Miss Penaluna's house stood several hundred yards below the doctor's. It was a strange jumble of periods, that street. Dashpers and Miss Penaluna's house were Georgian villas, while between them were ancient, whitewashed

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cottages, with walls three feet deep and chimney stacks that sheltered bright-green house-leek in their angles. After her guest had left, Miss Penaluna stood looking up the street at the Three Elms Inn on the other side of the road. Beyond the Three Elms a forge-fire blazed. The scent of sweetbriar, brought out by the damp freshness, struck her nerves like a bow drawn across a taut violin string. There was a man dying in one of the cottages; he would go out with the tide, she thought. Over the way a boy and girl stood hand in hand, hungrily looking in each other's faces. The zest of things, of life and death, of the heaving tide that beat like a human heart, Miss Penaluna was hungry for it all. She looked back at the windows of her house, where the curtains swayed in the sea-wind, and her heart smote her suddenly. She thought of her long imprisonment to old age and its savage craving that everything around should minister to its desires. For the higher the nature and the older the organism, the more it calls for all the world, man or woman, cabbage or stone, to yield it satisfaction. Civilization cannot cure this instinct; the utmost it can do is to hide it. Only one thing can kill this hungry selfishness, but how to name this thing men cannot agree. Some call it love, and others by yet another name. Adam, they say, spent quite a while naming animals in the garden. He has gone on, too, naming things pretty busily ever since, practising, no doubt, for the great day when he shall be able to name the powers that guide him because he knows them.

With heightened colour Miss Penaluna called to Captain Penrice, who chanced to be passing down the street.

"Come and see my garden," she said audaciously; for this is the myrtle land, where the geraniums are left out all the winter, and winter gardens here are not to be despised.

They paced along the mossy paths to the back of the

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house, where Susan watched them, round-eyed, from her kitchen window.

"And he's well set up, and a bachelor too," said she, for Miss Penaluna was at that moment bestowing a late rosebud on the captain.

"Come in," she said. "I've something for you to take to Mrs. Borlace, if you will. She left it here this morning."

Captain Penrice smiled at the little brown case she put in his hand; it was a cigarette-case.

"I gave her this," he said, "Miss Penaluna, though perhaps you wouldn't believe it."

He actually looked round for a chair, as though he meant to stay a while. Inwardly she thanked Heaven that no chair stood draped with stockings to air before the fire.

"I doubt," said he, "but I've made many a slip in bringing up my little maid; for you can't give her a trade that'll make her feel her feet under her. Seems like a blind alley for maids, life does. Why, I should have blowed my brains out fifty times if it hadn't been for a good solid job I could stick my teeth into. And how you ladies manage to get along without that fair beats me."

"Their work's different, Captain Penrice."

"So 'tis, so 'tis; and you've had your work cut out too, I make no manner of doubt. And the little maid'll have her work too, please God. That's why I let her tumble to a husband when the time had come, though I doubt but it's made his work harder, for he should ha' looked higher than boat-building for a wife if he wanted to make his way here. Altogether, I'm not easy, I can tell 'ee."

"It'll be all right, Captain Penrice. You mustn't worry. For, you know, lots of things that we seem to take hard, we women, don't hurt half as much as they seem to."

Captain Penrice's old eyes twinkled sharply into her pale ones.

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"She knows a deal," he thought, "more'n she shows. That's the way of 'em all, bless 'em." Aloud he said, "And you'll help, my dear, you'll help. Let her come and talk to 'ee freely. For there's squalls ahead. See here;" he picked up the local paper, which lay unopened on the table. "There's all this bother about the water supply, and after that article—which the doctor's at the bottom of, or I'm much mistaken—there's nothing before the town but to lay out the money on it. The future of the town's ruined else. Dr. Borlace has burnt his boats this time, and no mistake."

He pointed to the article headed "A Rising Health Resort," and Miss Penaluna read it while he looked round the spotless room that every Tuesday night was swathed at nine o'clock in dust-sheets against the Wednesday's cleaning.

"You think the doctor had a hand in this?"

"Certain," said the captain; "and I want you to tune Wilmot up to think it's a big fight that he's got before him. Sort of let her know it's as fine as a sea-fight in what she calls the old heroic days. She's the deuce of a maid for romance."

They parted on excellent terms, and Miss Penaluna was found by Susan to have contracted a habit of gazing absently at familiar objects as if they were now observed for the first time.

After leaving Miss Penaluna, Wilmot wandered down the road to the centre of things in Challacombe—to the harbour. The quay opposite was white with heaps of skate and ray, pig-like and pallid, interspersed with nameless amorphous masses—the devil-fish, angel-fish, or buffoon of the West Country fisherman. A black-bearded man with a bulbous forehead was pitch-forking them all aside.

For to-day the trawl had brought in strange harvest. The flags at the top of the ochreous sails flew half-mast to receive this harvest, and the men were lining up at the quay steps. Aproned women standing at the doors of

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fish-cellars paid their poor tribute of respect by throwing their aprons sideways to show the dark skirts beneath.

Up the granite steps from the boat men in gleaming oilskins lifted a heavy load, covered with a sail. It was a man of the fleet, lost overboard three weeks ago, and now brought up in his brother's trawl.

"That's the brother of the poor lad," said an old man beside Wilmot, pointing across at the scene, with chalk-jointed finger-knuckles.

His finger showed her a gigantic youth, with a boyish face for all his inches. He was the biggest man on the quay, for the trawlers run to breadth of shoulder rather than height, and somehow this tall fellow looked like the child of a larger race.

The procession passed the narrow streets, where the ice-cream men drove to-day a brisker trade than usual, beneath the iron rods, loaded with clothes, that hung across the cobbled courts. In the cellars here the women strained their bare arms at the wringers, or over the steaming tubs set up by the broken window-panes.

Suddenly, as the procession disappeared into the huddle of roofs, the crowd on the quay swayed to and fro, and a roar went up. From the side streets the bellow was echoed by the shriller notes of women, who called from doorways and wide-flung windows. A man fell, and the huddled oilskins closed above him; he was sucked into a human eddy.

"Ay, thank God, thank God, they've got 'en," said old Abel Godbear, hooking his bent claws into the crannies of the rock and gouging out dry fragments from it. "May God damn him in hell fire for ever and ever."

It was a Litany of hate that brought the taste of blood into Wilmot's mouth. She understood, for this soft-spoken race was her own, and she knew this savage lust that lay sleeping under its kindly exterior.

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"It's the skipper they've got," said the old man, "the skipper that got the poor lad's body in his trawl, tore out the rings from his ears that he wore for his bad eyes, and then threw 'em back again. That's the skipper of the *Fearnaught* they're maulin', they chaps. 'Twas his sweet-heart's prayers, they say, that brought 'em up a second time in his own brother's trawl."

Wilmot watched the impotent fingers that wrenched the masonry beside her; working and grasping, they interpreted the roar of the swaying crowd, at which she could not look.

At last, after what seemed an eternity, a shout sounded, a cry of authority, above the hoarse undertone of the crowd that rose and fell like the moan of a savage tide. A man pushed right and left into the swaying mass that parted before him. It was Dr. Borlace she saw as the crowd wavered and formed an alley of clear space that showed for a second her husband kneeling above a huddled figure.

When she came to herself she was leaning against the sea-wall, with the old man shaking her.

"My dear life," said he, "you give me quite a turn." He seemed quite a kindly old gentleman, instead of a ghou, as he propped her up. "Turned 'ee a bit sickish to see the chaps maul 'en. That's what 'tis."

"Is he dead?" she gasped.

"Bless 'ee, my dear, not he. They sort takes a deal o' killing. Not but what 'twould have been a good thing to have polished 'en off, too," he said regretfully. "Too many people by half in this here world. A war's a rare good thing too. Kill off all they Rooshians and Fenians, say I, and let's have elbow room."

"But why," said Wilmot, "did the skipper throw the lad's body back?"

"Couldn't have sold so much as a whiting, if it had come out that he's brought up a body with it. And the

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crew all told—when they got 'longside their missuses. A missus'll clear 'ee out of everything you've ever heard tell of, quicker'n I'd gut a sole."

For a second it gripped her, that sense of the power of the race instinct; for all her books and her thoughts she was of Challacombe flesh and blood, the flesh and blood that in narrow alleys or crowded main streets, in dingy shop-quarters or crowded cottage, went on its fretful way.

She was still feeling the tremour in the limbs that accompanies a sudden upheaval of the consciousness when she met Captain Penrice, and told him what she had seen.

"It was horrible, the look of hate on old Godbear's face. I couldn't bear to see it," she said.

"Ay, you've got a deal o' me in you," said Captain Penrice, looking at her fondly; "for there's one thing I can't bear—it's turned me coward a deal of times—and that's the hate in a man's eyes. You don't often see it, thank God, for I for one can't face it. I always try to hit out afore it gets there," he said naively, "for when I see it it turns me sick. You've a deal of me in you."

He was proud of the fact, as when one finds in one's self hidden points of resemblance to those who are the salt of the earth. For Wilmot had "It," the charm that catches folks' fancies in a golden net.

"But I should be like them, if they had hurt me awfully—or what I loved; I could twist my fingers too, like that old man, if they did some things to what was mine," said she.

"Ay, you've got it in you. It's the old spirit of Us o' hereabouts. True to their kin like the wild birds, or the rock eagles to their young—and savage as they. That's Us. But you go home, my dear, and mend your man's socks. 'Tis a deal wholesomer than looking inside yourself. For you'd better know naught o' that, till the time comes that it acts unknown to you."



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Up the winding road to Dashpers, Wilmot thought of the scene when she had first met her husband. The breaking of a crane in Captain Penrice's yard had crashed down a balk of timber on a man. She saw again the way in which her husband's large, surgeon's hands did their work on the maimed figure. Surely Dr. Tony had a capacity for the heroic somewhere; he played his part not ill from time to time. She felt quite purry, like a sun-warmed beast, as her fancies played over the *role* she meant for him—the hero of humble life. It was with a little three-cornered smile that she went into the house.

Two hours later, Dr. Borlace, who had fallen asleep on the sitting-room sofa after a disturbed night with a serious case, awoke to find the blinds down in the room, a cushion deftly slipped behind his head, and a winter rosebud, curled at the edges with the frost, but fresh as dew, propped up against his face.

With a smile that twisted his face sideways, and shut one of his eyes, yet expressed as much beatitude as a thanksgiving hymn, the doctor stuck the rose in his button-hole, fastening it with the small, white-headed pin he found cunningly stuck in the corner of the adjacent table-cloth. Singular to find one so handy, thought he, with a still broader smile.

“Making love to her own husband, the little hussy,” said he to himself. “Astonishing how late the roses are this year,” he observed to Wilmot at dinner later on. There was a wonderful turnip on the table that the doctor had grown himself; there never had been, nor would be again, such a turnip. Altogether a halcyon time, with turnips and roses, and—the careful observation of an ordinary man under that heroic light which is usually so trying to ordinary folks.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SURSUM CORDA

IT was very still on the great headland of Wooda as the doctor reined in his horse for a moment, so still, although the time was November, that the sleepy hiss of the waves could be heard for miles away, as they curled over the rocks, or crept over the sands. Gulls floated white against the evening dimness wherever the rocks opened seaward in weed-hung caverns; their cries echoed shrill and harsh from the nesting-places. To the left a ring of fire, the shore-lights of the fashionable watering-places on the other side of the bay, was beginning to spring up round the coast. Dr. Borlace was tired by the day's work, and as he took off his hat in order to feel the cool wind on his forehead, one could see, in fancy, some connection between its profile and the supposed story of his race. For he was a Pomeroy on his mother's side, and the Pomeroyes believed themselves to have been originally court-jesters, chosen for quaint *diablerie* of face or mind, to amuse the savage Norman court. Whence, so it was said, the name Pomeroy, or Pomme Roi, apple-king, because they came in with the dessert. Dr. Borlace, of course, knew that the voice of the fairy-teller must have been pretty busy with this genealogy, but the fancy amused him none the less, and certainly had much to do with his oddity of expression, which was, in partly natural, also partly acquired.

Slowly he rode back over the foundations of the Napoleonic camp that rest on still earlier Roman foundations,

for this headland is the supposed landing-place of Vespasian, and, honeycombed as it is with caves and wells, was certainly a Roman fort. As he crossed the wooden drawbridge that still spans the moat, the faint moon-crescent began to shine like the ghost of a golden sickle amongst clouds of palest lavender. The wind came faintly from inland, scented with the moor-breath, and smelling of dried heath, chamomile, and gorse—the wind that, dreamt of in equatorial swamps, is sweeter than the memory of water in the desert. The glow on the sky-line showed where the fires of Challacombe were lit. Suddenly, from a gorse bush at his feet, a lark started up, and the frightened thud of sheep-pads sounded. In the distance a bird tried a few notes that gurgled away into space as his eyelids closed to the peace that lives in wild places, and a rabbit, sitting at his hole, fled in terror from the shadow of horse and man.

As Dr. Borlace rode on, there started, almost from beneath his horse's hoofs, a woman, bare-headed and in some deadly terror.

"Will you come back with me," she cried, seizing his bridle, "my child's ill, and I was running to Challacombe to fetch 'ee for it?"

"Where?" said the doctor.

"Only over there. 'Tis but a step." She pointed across the down to a dim light that shone from beneath eyelids of shaggy thatch.

Breaking through the gorse-bushes, and heedless of rents and scratches, the woman led the way to the garden gate, where Dr. Borlace hitched his mare.

The child, a splendid creature of a few months old, lay panting for life on an old settle in the firelight. For some time the doctor had no time to heed the room or its occupants. Only, as a doctor always does, he caught the

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lithe intelligence of the mother as she obeyed his directions, in preparing hot water, or catching the import of a muttered word. At last there came a breathing space, when the tortured limbs found rest, and the quieter breathing told of safety.

"All right now, if you're careful," said he, smoothing back the soft hair from the baby's forehead, and noting with a smile the blue-veined skin, a sign of race, so they say, which he had last observed in his wife.

"It's a good thing I happened to be passing," he said at last; "it was touch-and-go for a time."

"I was afraid to ask 'ee to come first-long, till I saw what 'twas, and then I didn't care any more."

Dr. Borlace lifted the lamp-shade and raked woman and room with his glance.

"Of course," said he, after a pause of recollection, "I remember now. I didn't recognize you before."

"Yes, I'm Johanna Buckingham," she said, with a toss of the head that was belied by her quivering voice.

"So I see," said the doctor, dryly.

"I've been stopping for a bit with Mr. and Mrs. Laphorne. They took me in afore the child was born, though I dunno that I shall ever be able to pay 'em back."

An old woman, who had been waiting meekly in the background, now came forward. Mrs. Laphorne's red-rimmed eyes and dirt-engrained skin were in quaint contrast to her fluffy white fringe of hair, the gay flowers stuck in her bonnet, and the bugles on her withered body. Her husband shook and trembled, deaf and wordless, at her side.

"She's a good girl, is Johanna, for all the trouble she's been in," she quavered. "I've had three men myself, and they've all been good to me, and though John here is doting, a poor old trade, he's allays made a nest for his canary bird—that's me, sir. Haven't 'ee, John? But Johanna

never got a man that did aught for her but break her arm. But she'd took us in, John and me, before that, and give us a cup of tea, and I don't know that ever I wanted a cup of tea more'n I did the one she give us. So when she'd nowhere to turn to in Challacombe, she come up here to us."

"Well," said Dr. Borlace, "you look comfortable enough now."

"Ah," said Mrs. Laphorne, "just you see me in my Sunday bonnet! Beautiful, ain't it, John?" she shouted.

John nodded vigorously.

The doctor watched the woman as she leant sullenly against the head of the settle.

"Your child will do well enough now," he said.

She never answered, but flushed a fiery red as he touched the left arm that she carried strapped to her breast.

"Set properly?" he asked.

But Mrs. Laphorne was not to be silenced. "Iss, 'tis her cheeld; I'm not denying it for her. I've had plenty myself, though I dunno where they be now. Reared 'em careful, I did, with but an accident or two; but I've never seed anything to equal the way Johanna's tended that cheeld, though she'd be better with 'en dead, as I've told her scores of times if I've told her once."

"Come outside a minute," said Dr. Borlace to Johanna, as he took up his hat. "Good-bye," he said to Mrs. Laphorne, "old mother-o'-millions. It's Sunday to-morrow, and I shall be out here again; so don't forget the bonnet."

His manner changed as Johanna latched the door behind and they stood on the path between the hollyhock sticks. She was still sullen, but something in both woman and child had surprised him, for the poor wrappings of the baby, though in rags, had been spotless, and no gentlewoman's child could have been more carefully tended.

"What's this?" he asked again, touching a rent in the

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bodice of her dress through which the skin showed. He also noticed how the old brown dress she wore clung about her body.

"I've pawned every stitch of underclothing," she said.

"What are you going to do? The old people——"

"No, I can't take no more from them. They've kept me weeks from afore baby come till now, and they've but a few shillens a week from the parish."

Dr. Borlace stood for a moment with the bridle under his arm, considering what he knew of this woman, who had long been regarded as a scandal to Challacombe. Yet for all her veiled defiance he surmised an undertone of appeal to himself, not as to a doctor, but as to another human being. In this idea he was helped by the insistent fact of her devotion to the unfortunate, ill-begotten child, surely one of the most forlorn creatures that the world can show. He remembered the Buckingham family, the handsome, half-foreign-looking daughters, who supported a good-for-nothing father on the wages of sin. He bent steady eyes on her, wondering to find this woman in even such cleanly surroundings as these downs, for the courts of Challacombe were more native to such human wreckage.

Suddenly the instinct of the mother triumphed, and she burst into a lame kind of explanation.

"Dr. Earwaker," she said explosively, "won't tend the likes of her and me if he can help it. I didn't know as you'd really come to her when I stopped 'ee upon the down. But if you'd sent me to clink for stopping 'ee, I was bound to do it."

"How are you going to live till you can go back? You know he can be made to pay, the man that did this"—the doctor touched the strapped arm with his stock—"if not for the child."

"Not for the child," she said—"not to the likes of me ;

and if I could do it I'd never let him pay for what he hates. He broke my arm when he come back after his six weeks in the North Sea fleet, and she shall never take bite nor sup from his hands. There's allays the way over cliff, and that's better than being beholding to him."

"Stop that. Remember you're answerable for another life now."

She never disputed it, though Dr. Borlace thought of some other responsibilities, including those of the devil and all his imps.

"And father put me to door, for he'd have naught to do with me as 'twas, with the cheeld to be a burden. But I come away out of it all then," she continued, pointing to the glow in the sky that marked the hearth fires of Challacombe, "for I wouldn't bear the cheeld in that gutter of mud; but I went down there day by day, and some give me scrubbing and washing, just enough to keep the life in me and her."

"But," said the doctor, playing the part of devil's advocate for the sake of common sense, as he put it to himself, "you'll have to go back, for all the world's against you and your likes. How are you going to live else, and with that child?"

"See here, master," she said, laying a hand on his bridle, as if in appeal to the powers of the world, "you know what I be, and, maybe, you'll never believe what I tell 'ee, but . . . he wasn't the same to me as the others, that father of hers; and when he'd passed me in the street with his flaunting madam, I swore I'd go up, and his cheeld should go up too—up by the side of they that left me in the gutter, and wouldn't so much as have touched the likes of me. Ay, and his cheeld, for I loved 'en honest, shall wear her feathers, too, same as her that he scorned me for—honest ostrich-feathers, if the mother of it has to starve first."

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"It'll be none too easy for you to get bread, you know. For the world—and, for the matter in hand, Challacombe is the world—is hard to 'the likes of you.'"

"My Heaven, don't I know it? And I'd ha' thought same as you say, that I must go back to it all, down there, if it hadn't ha' been for the little maid. For I'd never ha' fought for myself, but I knowed I must for her. For her never ought to ha' been given the father and mother her was, and now I've got to do everything I can to make up to her for the way her come. Don't 'ee see, sir? Think o' the other chillern of honest women, and think of mine, and of what the l'ile maid would have to grow up to, if I was to bide to Challacombe in the old way. Don't 'ee see, sir?"

"By the Lord, I see," quoth Dr. Tony. "Shake hands on it, for you're a woman."

The rough words were the first she had ever heard that showed comprehension of her point of view, and they brought wonderful help, though the speaker of them felt the qualms which always shake one who has recklessly pitted a hedge-sparrow against a hawk, a woman against the social law.

"When it first come to me," she said, with the inward gaze of one who has passed through a scorching furnace of test, "'twas like when you lie and look up into the dark. Layer upon layer o' darkness, one behind t'other, that no eye could come to the end of it. Up and up the darkness went, and me at the bottom, with no stairway for to climb it with. I felt fair stifed with the weight o' blackness that stretched up, and I mind how I put up the flat o' my hands to press it back, up, away from my face."

Suddenly into the doctor's mind there flashed a phrase he had once heard on the lips of a great scholar, a courtly old man, whose path had led only through the cleanly way of noble thought—a curious soul to link with this piece of human waste from the social midden of Challacombe; yet



the phrase flashed all the same : it was, "merely the high tradition of the world." Surely here, thought Dr. Tony, the high tradition of the world was answered clearly enough in the struggle of this poor drab of the Challacombe slums. For the winds of the spirit still blow from the great deeps of nobility, even into the hottest pest-house of human frailty. The doctor had mounted, as he would not have done while talking to a lady, yet now he suddenly lifted his hat, not as to a lady, but as to some symbol of that "high tradition" of struggle and sacrifice that makes the garnered glory of this human life.

"We'll try to build the stairway," he said, in a voice that shook slightly.

"Ay," she said, following her own train of thought, and unconscious of the effect of her words ; "I'm bound to win up, for my Elizabeth. For I must pay back to her. She'll be none the worse for to-night, will she?"

"She'll be a splendid creature," said the doctor, with conviction, "if you take care."

Johanna flushed as if he had given her an imperial order of merit. She remembered how he had turned back the clothes to look at the rounded limbs of the little come-by-chance that man regarded not.

"I'll fight for her," she said, "and he shall never give me a penny piece. I want to forget she isn't all mine."

"It'll be uphill work," said the doctor.

"I know ; but I scrubbed and cleaned, and took the roughest jobs for a meal, afore her come, and I can again and will. But it's took my strength, for I've been so bad."

"A capital imitation of hell we've made down here, for all this," said the doctor, waving his whip at the peace all around.

White cloud-masses, like lumps of glorified curds, covered the sky, and the dusky penumbra of the moon shadowed

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each mass in turn, as she rode poised in the black depths behind the curd-masses.

"And Nature herself pitchforks some of us into the fire with the tongs, else why are you here with that child in your arms?"

"Iss, fay, doctor," flashed Johanna, "but she pitchforks some of us out again with the same tongs, for the child's given me the heart to fight up. I couldn't have done it without her."

"Gad, and you've some wit too. You'll win, you'll win yet."

Ever so little sharpness was a better test than honesty with the doctor any day.

"Trust in God and keep your powder dry," he said; "that means, keep the kettle boiling and the window open day and night, and the little maid will pay you back yet. Break a pane if old mother-of-millions wants the window shut. I'll be out again to-morrow."

He leant down from his horse, and in her hand when he was gone there was a half-sovereign, a little symbol of the human help which is all Divine. The gaunt woman, massive in figure, and great in muscle, like a statue by Constantin Meunier, stood holding the gate with her hand. She was dry-eyed, for the fighting stuff that makes women like this does not run to tears.

The coral island is built on the foundations laid by minute, unmarked organisms; the trade routes that lead across the deserts have been marked out by the passing of myriads of forgotten footsteps. In the same way, the roads of trades and professions have been marked out by men for men, and beaten level by the tread of thousands of forgotten workers. Along these roads the least capable man may advance now by the line of least resistance, but for women there are, as yet, few such roads and these

but ill-paved and flinty. For the great route across this world is, for women, the narrow way of marriage, or the broad, primrose way of the illicit service of man; and to leave either the broad or the narrow, but particularly the broad, is very difficult and involves much cross-country going, since to untrained feet, the flints of the trade routes, after the smooth paths, cut sore. For either in the narrow way of marriage or the broad way of illicit service, man's sense of the value of property has driven him to keep the roads in good repair, but in the world of work the woman keeps the road clear for herself. There was, then, before Johanna an endless amount of road mending, in which Dr. Borlace, after his eccentric fashion, was keen to help, for your male Quixote is never more plainly marked than by the zeal which he displays in helping a woman along the very "open" roads that wend towards the market-place, where effort of head or hand is sold.

However, by the next day a good deal of his enthusiasm had waned, for the impression of strength which he had caught from Johanna had faded somewhat. For she would need, not the febrile strength of momentary excitement, but the steady control of a cliff climber who must take advantage of every foothold and never look down. It was characteristic of Dr. Borlace that never for a moment did a thought of the obscurity of the problem strike him, for there was in his quixotry a quality of fine perception that never mistook gold lace for heroism. Besides, he dearly loved a pariah, and he had found one in this outcast. Thinking of the difficulties she had already surmounted, he began to feel a flickering of the zeal of the night before. His hopes revived again—and at a queer sight. So interested had he become in Johanna's struggle that he returned quite early next morning to the cottage. In the moist air of a rainy day the shaggy thatch looked like the fur on a terrified

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rabbit's back. On the table within stood the remains of breakfast, and as Johanna rose from her place, he saw that it had consisted of porridge and milk. The doctor's spirits rose as he noted among the few cracked plates on the dresser a packet marked Quaker Oats.

"Bravo!" said he to himself, "she's got sense and she's worth helping or I'm a Dutchman."

The old people were absent; Mrs. Laphorne was gone to fetch the milk, and John was in bed with rheumatism.

"Now then," said Dr. Borlace, who was always more ready to waste time over out-of-the-way incidents than on his regular round, "sit down and let's talk about you."

The ashes in the fireplace were spreading fine dust over the room, as the scuds of wind blew down the chimney. Johanna gently covered the smouldering mass with fire bricks, and was silent during the process.

"Can't you speak?" said the doctor testily: when things interested him he found words slow, and the sounds ran out of his mouth in a rush.

"First, I'll give 'ee back all but three shillen of what you gave me yesterday, and the rest I'll pay 'ee back some time, though I'll never be able to pay 'ee for your kindness."

She handed him the seven shillings, to get the change for which she had walked along the coast to the coastguard station that morning.

"What are you going to do now? You want good food to get back your strength. For that you must get work."

"I suppose I must go upon tramp. They'll never give me work to Challacombe that will keep us both. I must go where I bain't known, I suppose. But I've never been far from Challacombe, and I'm afeard of strange places, where the vittles isn't the same as we get here and the faces be strange. I can't bear to go, if only we could live."

"Live it down here. That's what I should do. It's cowardly to turn from a handful of fools too mean to understand."

For the moment his own troubles had faded; for what sounds are to the musician, human notes were to Dr. Borlace.

"I've thought of that too; but I can't bear to face folks, somehow. I take her out among the furze-bushes, and when anybody comes by that knows me, I crookie down by a big bush so's not to be seen. And yet I don't want to go."

"What can you do?"

"I can keep a house clean, but I can't sew nor cook—not to please gentlefolks."

"Get a cookery book and learn to cook. You women never have the grit to learn a trade—amateurs, the whole lot."

Johanna looked round the poverty-stricken place, thinking that there was not much to practise upon in Mrs. Laphorne's house.

Dr. Tony noticed it and understood. "I don't mean here," he said. "I'll get you a place, where you mustn't mind having to take little wages. You must learn all you can, put the child to nurse, and save every penny for it."

"'Tis what I thought of," said Johanna, in a low voice; "'tis what I hoped for. But I know it can't be; there isn't anybody would take me, not that knows about me."

"We'll see," said the doctor, suddenly remembering his patients. "I'll take twenty-four hours to look for some one in that old nesting-place of brainless wonders down there"—he pointed to Challacombe—"that's got heart to know when it's worth while saving a drowning woman. You trust to me," he shouted. "Mind, I shall tell no lies, as

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you women do when you're writing what you're pleased to call a 'character.' Your future employer shall know the truth about you, and I hope it'll shame her. A fat lot of 'em would have had the spunk to come out of that life with that little child in their arms."

"I dunno," said Johanna, glowing with his praise, yet belittling herself, as one does in moments of elation, "that I could ha' done it if she hadn't been a proper beauty. Ah, my lovely!" she said, hiding her face in the child's little body.

So he left her, and by the end of the day had gained for himself an additional reputation for queerness by the insistence with which he pleaded Johanna's cause, but had failed to find a mistress for her. Several offered jobs of work, occasional and fitful, and several spoke of the "example." At last he met Miss Penaluna down by the quay wall. The doctor was furious at the failure of his plans, and inclined to kick the meekest dog that ever curled itself on a door-mat.

A grey twilight enwrapt the serried rows of houses; the harbour, the bay, and the sky shimmered with a silvery haze, as the red-brown sails brought the trawlers to their anchorage. But the beautiful shadows hid, to the doctor's mind, just mean and helpless minds.

"Miss Dorothy," he said, "come and talk to me. Let's lean over the wall while you listen to the little tale I want to tell you."

They were standing just over Captain Penrice's ship-building yard, and the smell of shavings filled the air.

Then he told the story of Johanna, plainly, yet with a reticence that, while making all clear to Miss Dorothy, gave her no shock. If ever one had been inclined to wonder whether Dr. Tony were a gentleman, one would never have doubted it after hearing him tell that story.

"Now, will you help?" said he, bluntly.

"What can I do?" asked she.

Her heart was thumping against her side, yet the moment was painfully pleasant, for she felt the thrill of adventurous living. Miss Dorothy had once been young—nay, she was not far off youth even now in spirit—and the west wind of spring, that rushes along with the scent of bursting buds and the chirp of newly born birds, had thrilled her pulses, too, to the tune of joy and the whip-lash of subtle pain.

"Do?" said the doctor. "Take her in, give her work and small wages till she's some use, but enough to pay for the child. Five shillings a week 'll do that for months yet. I've found a woman to take her—an honest woman, too!"

Miss Dorothy began to tremble; then she burst out, "I can't! Oh, I don't want to say no—I don't, really!" In her extremity she laid her neatly gloved little hand on his arm. A glove minus a button would have been pain to Miss Dorothy, and she regularly took an hour to dress. "There's my little maid that waits on me, and isn't to be married yet awhile. I couldn't send her away, and I couldn't put her to mix with a girl like Johanna. Don't you see that I couldn't? How do you know what she mightn't learn from her? Oh, I wish I could do it! I'd not be afraid for myself a bit, though I don't suppose she's even honest. I could always lock up everything but the second-best spoons and forks. No, I'd not be afraid for myself."

Dr. Borlace smiled grimly at the idea of Miss Dorothy's contamination, but he was in a towering rage all the same.

"Good-day, madam," he said furiously.

Miss Penaluna walked up and down her room all the evening. Twice she seized pen and paper to write and offer money to help "the poor creature," but the thought that Captain Penrice would hear of her queer behaviour stopped that impulse too.

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Meanwhile Dr. Tony strode homewards, with his hat pulled over his eyes, so that he recognized no one. Several trawling gentlemen stopped open-mouthed to regard him, and returned home to tell their wives that the doctor had got his black dog up again.

Dr. Tony burst into his house. "Wilmot," he shouted, "come down, I want you. Leave what you're doing."

"What is it, Tony?" she said quietly.

"I've got an idea," he cried; "indeed, two ideas. Now just you listen to what I have to say, and don't open your mouth till I've finished."

She had shown no signs of doing so, knowing the danger of interrupting the doctor in full flood.

He told his story. "Now," said he, "we'll take her in, pay her three pounds in advance as wages, so that she can fit herself out and pay for the baby. She's a woman, I tell you—she'll learn, and she'll be a comfort to you. The other girl can't boil a potato."

"Have you counted the cost, Tony, of what you propose? Disreputable people perhaps coming here and all the place chattering about us."

"They do that anyway, the apes. Let 'em do it."

"Oh, quite so," shrugged Wilmot, "as far as I am concerned."

"Never mind all that. If you live with the devils of the pit all round you, the least you can do is to clout 'em over the head from time to time. Wilmot, here's a poor soul just waiting for us—to push her back 'into the gutter or not, as we please. Which shall it be? You're a woman; it's you who can help her, after all, not I."

"Tony," said Wilmot, "I like yo u very much—very much, sir."

"You do me proud, madam," he said, delight rioting



within, though he dissembled. For was he not a fine fellow? When Wilmot recognized it heaven was about him.

"Yes, Tony," she said, "we'll have her, and I'll try to help her every way I can."

She was thinking inwardly that the hardest part—the chatter—it would be hers to bear.

Sitting over the fire in her own sitting-room that night, Wilmot laughed to herself at the thought of the doctor's excitement. She held one of the current reviews that were sometimes sent across to them by Captain Penrice. Challacombe always seemed like the Dark Ages by the side of the wider atmosphere of these messages from the outer world: pictures, books, plays, exciting new scientific theories; what did Challacombe care for such things—Challacombe, to whom art was represented by a painting of a fat sheep, with the weight of its limbs, when killed, fastened below? Worst of all, Tony was contented to sink into an intellectual do-nothing, who did not even glance into the medical papers he received, and who agitated himself over—Johanna. Yet here a suspicion, an idea of a possible pettiness in herself, struck her, and with the notion came the idea that it was her duty to cultivate Tony. She tip-toed across the hall in order to peep into the consulting-room, for he ought to be working at his Rabelais paper, or at least reading Lucretius.

She stood, herself unheard, watching from the doorway; he sat bending down across his writing-table, and she noticed that the bald patches were certainly widening. Then she suddenly turned away and fled upstairs—she was laughing and panting a little. As she closed her door, she said, "After all, he's rather a dear, for all he's so humdrum." As she moved about, touching the ornaments in her room, she hummed a song, for it was her own photograph at which she had caught him looking so intently.

Nevertheless, the next morning the maid hammered long

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at the doctor's door, for the room below was full of parish patients, and a woman waited two hours for a death certificate. Wilmot was speechless with indignation. But Johanna took up her abode at Dashpers, and that week Miss Penaluna amazed Susan by ordering the ironing-board to be prepared on a Friday. Now the week's ironing was over by Thursday at latest, and Susan's faculty of wonder was much exercised. Late into the night, with furtive secrecy, as if committing a crime, Miss Dorothy starched and ironed and goffered tiny frocks and under-garments, all rather yellow with lying by, yet dainty. A few days later Johanna's little Elizabeth left off her shell of ragged shawls: there was a fine robe among Miss Penaluna's treasures, and the baby wore it at its christening, where Dr. Borlace promised and vowed on its behalf with great cordiality. It was all to him, of course, only a quaint survival of superstition, but to Johanna it meant another pull up the rocky pathway to a cleaner life, and to give her that Dr. Tony would cheerfully have sacrificed to Ra or Osiris, or any power that happened to be in fashion.

## CHAPTER XIV

### HONEY FROM THE ROCK

TO-NIGHT it was freezing out at sea, and even in sheltered Challacombe the wind moaned against the close-shut windows. On a January night like this Diogenes found a warmer resting-place than the window-seat, for he slept on Dr. Borlace's knee in front of the consulting-room fire. It was one of the doctor's rare nights of leisure, and content radiated from him, marred only by the fact that Wilmot had not appeared to give him his tea. Still, he had frustrated her in the matter of slippers after all. That morning he had found her in the act of destroying a pair—old, worn, and hideous, but beloved. Snatching them from their funeral pile, he had enjoyed a triumph all day.

At last the door opened with a rush of fresh air and the scent of violets. It was Wilmot with a nosegay at her breast.

"I'm so sorry, Tony," she said, flinging aside her outdoor garments, "that I wasn't in to give you your tea, but I've been having a gossip with Mrs. Coad, all about you."

She stood curling rings of hair on her fingers in front of the mirror. It was the old one that the doctor had cracked, now with a new glass.

Dr. Tony merely grunted.

"Tony, I'm sorry for what I said this morning, but I never know things, somehow."

"What did you say?" he asked, between puffs of his pipe. He remembered perfectly, but expected enjoyment from her apologies, and so made the most of them.

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"Why, that you never did anything," she said, kneeling down by him excitedly; "and now I hear that you have induced them to pay for a district nurse, and it will be splendid for the poor people. You know you never told me a word about it, and now everybody is singing your praises."

They solemnly shook hands, for the doctor now never attempted uninvited caresses. Hidden in the background of the thoughts of both there was the question of the new water supply, which ere many days had elapsed would be a settled matter; but about this the strictest silence reigned between them, for both dreaded speech that might reveal even more visibly the gulf between creatures so closely linked by outward lot. Meanwhile, Dr. Borlace tried to live according to the Stoic motto, "The only point that matters is that we do our duty." It must be confessed, too, that he did it, not altogether without gleams of joy in the heroic limelight that his wife so rejoiced to turn on the bare drama of the humdrum.

"I'll do more than bring in a district nurse," he said, concealing his pleasure under a scowl of determination.

"Tony, do you know they call you the man in a hurry?" said Wilmot, beginning to laugh as she crouched on the rug by his side. "I heard all about Mrs. Perrett's baby from Ann Coad."

Dr. Tony recognized the affair to which she referred, and blushed, being as modest as Uncle Toby. Mrs. Perrett's baby taking an unconscionable time in starting on its earthly career, the doctor wished to expedite matters, being a man of humanity, but Mrs. Coad stood in his way literally.

"You don't go up these stairs with that black bag," she said, "not without you go over my body, young man."

Mrs. Coad's body being mountainous, Dr. Borlace yielded.

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"Mrs. Coad is a most shocking female, Wilmot," said he. "I really wonder at you."

"So she is," laughed Wilmot; "but you're a tender-hearted old thing all the same, Tony."

The doctor felt like a god with the sweet savour of the worshippers' incense in his nostrils.

"Supper," ordered he, standing up to stretch. "I've just poured a wine-glass of port into the Stilton. It's just ripe too. The world's still worth living in when one can get Stilton."

However, Wilmot showed but little appreciation of the drunken Stilton. She was evidently preoccupied, after her fit of elation. After supper Lucretius came out, but her mind seemed far away from the work.

"Just listen to this," she said, reading from the well-worn copy in front of her—

" ' Scilicet in tenero tenerascere corpore mentem  
Confugient. Quod si iam fit, fateare necessest  
Mortalem esse animam. . . . '

"Of a truth, they will have recourse to the idea that the mind gathers weakness from the weak body it inhabits. But if that is so, it must be confessed that the soul is mortal." She read and translated slowly, as if the simple words brought far-reaching thoughts. "Is that what you believe too," she said suddenly—"soul and body both to decay together? Very simple too. Tony," she continued, pushing away the small table covered with papers at which she sat, "I'll read no more Lucretius just now; not till after the next few months, anyway."

"Why?" The doctor was one of the human gadflies who affect that monosyllable.

"Is that what you believe too," she repeated, answering him indirectly, "that life is but a blind struggle of atoms and the end but darkness? Tony, is my child a mere concurrence of atoms?"

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"Brought together by the will of man," he said somewhat brutally.

Dr. Borlace belonged to the type that insists on definitions, especially of poetry and those other strange human fancies that neither microscope nor scalpel can tackle. The mystery of the universe, whose dwelling is the ages and the soul of man, was as plain to his thinking as a turnpike road. Yet the passionate questioning of one so near to him as Wilmot had its influence even on him.

"How strange that you should say that! Archelaus said that too. 'The will of man,' she repeated; "but that will, Tony, whence does it come?"

He was silent, and turning to the window she threw up the sash. In the lull of the wind they heard the dash of the waves.

"Listen," she said, "it's sounding like that to-night over at Zennor, where father's people lie close to the sea, generations of Quicks, yet quick no longer in the body. And like the sea that roars and the wind that moans the sea and wind of man's will. I want my child to feel the wonder of it, not to dismiss it all like this." She struck the worn copy of the old Roman thinker who seemed to-night like the visible spirit that denies.

Dr. Borlace watched her under bent brows, as she beat herself up against the rocks of an unknown fear, whose presence in her he had only surmised.

"Zennor," he said tenderly; "they've queer fancies over there, haven't they? That's the place where a mermaid came up out of the sea to hear the singing of the Zennor men. Are you a changeling, child?" he asked, drawing her up to him.

"Tony, can Archelaus hurt now—hurt *him*? I wake with a start, over and over again, thinking so. You know they say down west that the dead come back, and you see them looking through a child's eyes."

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"It's nothing but pagan madness. How can you be so superstitious? But I don't say you can't do harm by such fancies."

"I've Balhatchet blood in my veins," she said.

"And is that madder than any other sort?"

Truth to say, he found this emotional atmosphere wearing.

"Don't you know what Balhatchet means?"

"Deuce take me if I do."

"It's 'high priest of Baal.' I've the blood in me that once hurled the flint arrow-head. Poor Tony, he doesn't like people who probably hacked themselves with knives when things went cross. But I'm weak-minded to-night. Let's talk of something else."

Dr. Borlace sat smoking in silence, and wondering at the habit of repression which he had never suspected in his wife. For, though she had spoken in a half-jesting manner, he knew that she brooded much and wordlessly over the fate of the lad at Bossiney. But life offered the doctor few opportunities for meditation, and after supper he had to go out again. Wilmot was, however, sufficiently interested in him to sit up till his return, just to ask him a question about his literary tastes. Her interest in Dr. Tony might be "botanizing," but it was, all the same, sufficiently flattering to masculine vanity.

"Tony, why do you like George Crabbe so much?" she asked, as he came in dragging off his overcoat. The fire had quite gone out by this time, but she had shut the windows.

"Couldn't you have asked me that to-morrow?" said he, crossly, reaching for the whisky and a glass.

"No, I want to know now. I've been reading him a good deal lately to find out why you like him. Rabelais, Horace, Lucretius, Crabbe, that's your list."

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Such interest was flattering, and the whisky was soothing. Dr. Tony sat down heavily in the armchair and consented to answer.

"Well," he said, "he doesn't give you the heroic or even the tragic-sordid, that's about the size of it. It's just commonplace life, as it is exactly—whist-parties, fuddling and eating, the pleasures of hobbies, the village midwife, the lying tombstone, the paltry parson, the dirty gutter—all exact. His people aren't starched up to the nines, and his scenes aren't starched to suit the respectable."

"But he's a most respectable person, always worrying youth about the dangers of giving way to the passions."

"Just so, because of the very uncomfortable results of such giving way. He knows the ugly effects of what others consider heroic, titanic, horrific. Crabbe's reality: life isn't pretty, and it isn't terrible; it is just quaint and contradictory—that's his burden of humanity."

"Just like you, quaint and contradictory," said Wilmot, rising and stretching out her arms with a yawn; "but there are terrors in it, too."

"And then you can go to Lucretius," retorted Dr. Tony.

"And he sneers."

"Ay, maybe; but he sees the terrors, and none of the four that you call my list drivel about what they don't understand, and they're exact in the words they use and the ideas they describe. Rabelais, Lucretius, Horace, and Crabbe—yes, they'll pretty well fit you up."

"And the Book of Job," finished Wilmot, preparing to go.

"Don't understand it," growled the doctor; "it was written under the vault of heaven, and I've lived mostly under a whitewashed ceiling with a plaster rose to ornament a set of gas-jets."



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He disappeared for a time, leaving her still botanizing. When he returned, it was with a daintily laden tray.

"Comfort thy soul with apples," he said, putting it down in front of her with the air of a professional waiter.

In lieu of apples she beheld a boiled egg, hot milk, honeycomb, and dainty slices of bread-and-butter. Johanna was in bed, and she knew that he had prepared the meal himself.

"Tony, you are good to me, and I'm so sorry I let the fire out," she said repentantly.

"Eat it up, there's a good child," growled Dr. Borlace. "You'd no supper, and you've been mentally flinging arrow-heads at the universe all the evening."

At the end of her meal she came to him, and held up her mouth to be kissed like a child. She usually shrank from caresses, and the doctor was startled out of his mask of indifference.

"Child," he said, framing her face in his hands, "you don't fear me as you once did? You don't shrink from me?"

"Not a bit. Poor Tony, it isn't far to have got, is it? And I give you——"

"What?"

"All you asked from me," she laughed. As a fact, she could have sung aloud for malice. For had she not sworn long ago to break down his coldness? Respect, indeed, when the true note for a woman's ear is "Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee."

"Ah, you have me there," he sighed, turning away.

"I thought I said you might kiss me to-night, sir."

"Little devil! wanting to force me to make love to my own wife."

"You didn't do it, you see, before we married," she purred softly.

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Something suspiciously bright gleamed in his eyes as she glanced maliciously into them.

"Ah," said he, gently, "pigling, your lips are covered with honey."

"Honied, of course," she laughed.

"Where the bee sucks" he heard her singing in the queer low croon that was all she could achieve in the way of a voice, though she did hail from Zennor, where they sing music that wins the sea-maids.

An hour later he shaded the candle from her face as she lay asleep; one hand rested on the coverlet, and as he approached a forefinger towards it the hand closed on it, as he had seen a baby's close hundreds of times before.

Fortuitous conglomeration of atoms as he might be, it was something very like a prayer that spoke in Dr. Borlace's heart—a prayer for his stupid self, that had been so blandly complacent of passion and reason, a prayer, above all, for the child that was coming without its proper heritage—the unity of nature with nature in its parents that alone gives splendid children, worthy of the sunlight and the race of man. For this child was born of man's self-will and woman's curiosity.

Through the open window the sea was sounding as if it would tear the boats by which the town lived out of the crowded harbour; every little child down those swarming courts appeared to-night to have a better chance than this freak-begotten baby of theirs. The air in the quiet room began to seem full of tiny beating hands and throbbing hearts, till the tension above the sleeper half woke her, and she loosed his finger, sighed, and curled closer. Gently closing the door behind him, the doctor went to his own room, where, hours later, he fell asleep to the screaming of a flock of gulls that fled landward from the storm.

## CHAPTER XV

### LOADED DICE

HALF the customary household labours seemed to Wilmot but Moloch worship; consequently, she allowed neither herself nor any other woman to offer up youth and strength to clothes, furniture, and, above all, to floors. For no one, said she, has yet ever accurately calculated the back-aching produced by the mere sweeping of carpets; the image should have been that of a woman with a dustpan, not a man with a muck-rake, for the one is far commoner than the other. The den—drawing-room one could not call it—of the mistress of Dashpers was, therefore, a shock to all the susceptibilities of Challacombe. Uncarpeted, with papers everywhere, and with sketches of fish pinned to the walls, it belonged to a woman who refused to join that class of true-born Englishwomen, who worship the “home,” in the sense of preferring a stuffy sitting-room to all the glories of the Pitti palace.

In this room Wilmot was sitting with eyes fixed on the *Regiswear Gazette*, but with inward gaze evidently directed to something behind the printed page. Before her was an article on the water supply of Challacombe, an article in which she recognized the work of two minds, for Dr. Borlace was evidently behind the editor. John Patient of the *Gazette*, had his own method of leading, which consisted in waiting till more than half his so-called followers were ahead of him. Just now this system was apparent; evidently the new water supply was a foregone conclusion. Nothing could stand against it, if the future of the town as a health resort was to be considered. Next day the Urban

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District Council would give their vote for it, if Patient were the mouthpiece of the majority, as was usually the case.

And still not a word of the real issue, the question of the method of piping to be adopted, was allowed to appear. Evidently this was to be slurred over, or only, at most, to occur in the reports of the meetings. Wilmot asked herself to whom was that omission to be ascribed. Was Tony hedging in the matter, and leaving the ultimate decision to the chance of the hour when it came? For the doctor was certainly behind the editor, and in all the talk she had heard, only Captain Penrice had referred to the real issue, but he had been explicit. She began to walk restlessly up and down, pausing abstractedly to pin a sketch straighter. Another thought was always before her, ominous in view of the idea in her mind, the fact that in his references to the matter, the doctor had still resolutely kept silence even to herself over the real difficulty.

Just at that moment she heard that a caller was being shown into the dining-room. It was Councillor Meech, as she knew from his resonant voice. Both doors were ajar, and from where she stood she could hear distinctly. Builders of small houses have much to answer for; the results of incompatible tempers shut up in rooms twelve feet by twelve are not all shown in the divorce courts. It was not the water and the crust that drove love out of the door, but merely the size of the rooms. Better link yourself to a fiend incarnate in a roomy mansion than to a person of ordinary irascibility in a four-roomed cot.

In this case the builder of Dashpers had to answer for something other than nervous irritation, for Wilmot stood where she was, intent on the answer to the questions she had just asked herself. She scarcely paused for self-justification, for it was enough to know that Tony shut her out of the confidence he shared with Captain Penrice.

Councillor Meech would one day be Mayor of Challacombe; at present he was postman, councillor, and Poor Law guardian. His great characteristic was a breathless energy that drove his head and shoulders far ahead of his feet, though these were by no means lagging members. His spare form flew up and down the streets, his thin face worked itself into a thousand wrinkles by the pressure of the steam always kept up by the nerves within. His voice was always loudest in the decision of affairs: at one moment he would be pushing a cart loaded with mail-bags; at another, busily hustling paupers on the way they should go—namely, gravewards; at another, inspecting the tramps' lodging-house. His great idea was sanitary science, and his standpoint an acceptance of the "facts" of life, especially the ugly ones.

"No use running in blinkers," was the phrase most often on his lips, whether it was concerning the housing of professions that seek the slums or the cost of paupers to the town. Councillor Meech got through an enormous amount of work in the day, and some of it was excellent, which is more than can be said for most of us. And if he did occasionally chuck a loud-voiced, buxom inmate of the House under the chin, was not that also an acceptance of the inevitable? "Homo sum," said Councillor Meech. Just now the worthy man felt that the future prosperity of Challacombe lay on his shoulders, and that now the moment had come for him to seize affairs by the forelock. The new railway, the new water supply, the flaunting of the town in the face of tourists by the newspapers—and he could rely on a journalist son for that—the simultaneous happening of all these must not be stopped by any nonsensical philandering on the part of Dr. Tony. Councillor Meech looked at the affair of the piping as "a practical man." The town could not afford anything but lead, iron being too troublesome and health-pipes too dear, so that the alternatives were:

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no water supply and the good name of the town gone, or lead pipes and a few cases of obscure symptoms about which no one, save the doctors, need know anything.

No sane man could think twice as to the alternative he would choose. Besides, if large towns found lead pipes good enough, why should not Challacombe? "Local conditions, indeed," sniffed the councillor to himself as he pushed his way head foremost up the hill to Dashpers. "Who should know more about local conditions than I, who have lived in the place for forty years?"

It was the day before the meeting of the Water Committee, and the doctor knew no more what his ultimate decision would be than he had months ago; in fact, there could be no decision in the proper sense of the word, since it is never intellectual choice that decides when the full current of desire pulls in a certain direction. We choose in small things; in great we are driven by the series of choosings that have gone before.

It was the councillor's cue to assume that there had been no discussion of the point at issue in anybody's mind; besides, having once decided for himself, it really seemed of little importance to him whether others had made up what they called their minds. The doctor had spoken plainly to him, however, for he knew that Mr. Meech was the thinking part of the assembly that, for the time being, ruled the destinies of Challacombe. Gain him, you gained all.

"Well," began Mr. Meech, rubbing his fingers longways, as if to restore a sluggish circulation, though he was the last man to suffer from this complaint. Perhaps he did it on the same principle that makes very thin people feed on toast. "Well, doctor, so we shall do the job of this water business. I've talked to Varcoe and Poad and a few others, and they'll carry it through, I make no doubt."

Dr. Borlace may have relaxed a muscle or two somewhere

near his mouth, but Mr. Meech's bright eyes were twinkling all over the room, and he never noticed that.

"We'll get out the contract notices," continued the councillor comfortably, "straight away. It'll be a race between the town and the railway to see who'll get through first. But I'm for doing it first-hand and not by contract—cheaper in the long run I always say."

He rather calculated he was taking away Dr. Tony's breath by the ease with which he was gliding over the main point, like a fine lady who never mentions freckles, but talks about the more elegant "sunburn."

"But," said the doctor, pushing back his chair with a grating sound, "what about the piping?"

"Oh, the usual thing—iron mains and lead connections with the houses; everything else is out of the question, you know. I've sounded everybody, and they all agree that we couldn't entertain any other idea for a moment. Out of the question for a little place like this."

"You know what I told you," said Dr. Tony, gazing out of the window with absorbing interest, "about that town that shall be nameless, and girls that come in from the country getting white and bloodless in a few weeks, and children ditto. What do you make of it, eh?"

"Oh, they think it fine, the sluts," said the councillor cheerfully, "pinching their waists, drinking vinegar, putting stuff on their cheeks—that's what that means. Don't you tell me! I wasn't born yesterday."

The councillor's nose began to waggle, as it always did when he was irritated or found himself facetious.

The doctor was silent; he felt like an indignant constituent when the member he has voted for fritters away an important Bill by jests on the temperature, or the place of woman—the wit-producing points of the British Parliament.

The councillor felt he must speak more plainly.

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"They've made up their minds, and you can't move 'em," he said; "it'll be water with lead pipes or none. And you'll only do yourself a mischief if you run your head against what's impossible—or seems so to the ruck of 'em." The "ruck of 'em" were as useful to Mr. Meech as a sleeping partner.

"As how?" said Dr. Tony, curtly.

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," sneered the other, "but there'll be means of doing you a hurt—there'll be means or they'll make 'em. They'll put up with no overstepping of what they call a man's duty."

"But," began the doctor, stormily, "I fail to see the overstepping."

"Just so," said the councillor, with hands uplifted in deprecation; "just so, but we are not a forward lot, as you may have noticed. I'm only saying this because I thought it fairer to you—and we can't put any extra pressure on the rates. But I must be stepping."

The doctor, vaguely fretted, followed him to the door.

"You may be sure that every word I've said is correct," said Mr. Meech as a last shot; "there's no manner of use in your knocking your head against a stone wall."

With a plunge head foremost down the slope to the quay he was gone. He had probably come to deliver an ultimatum, as official and less damaging than if it had been openly spoken in the Council next day. Still, thought Dr. Borlace, he would not take the man's word for it alone: Patient, the editor of the *Gazette*, would know something of the attitude of the rest of the Council.

Late that night the doctor's key sounded: the hall light had been extinguished, but a glimmer came from Wilmot's sitting-room. She stood within, listening, and her heart sank as she heard him taking off his boots and placing them stealthily on the canvas: he did not wish to see her to-night.



"Tony," she said, suddenly opening her door, so that the light flashed across the hall to the chair where he sat, and gleamed on the white outline of his face, "Tony, have you had supper?"

Her heart was beating loudly with anxiety, but she would do nothing to show him which way she wanted him to choose to-morrow.

"I had it at Regiswear," he said quietly.

"He's been there to know what they say," she thought to herself.

She followed him into his room, though she felt that he wanted her away. She began plaiting and unplaiting the fringe of the tablecloth with shaking hands, while his look questioned hers gravely. Each wanted to read the other's thoughts, but there seemed a dense barrier between them, and pride prevented the quick leaping of speech across the chasm.

"You've had Mr. Meech here to-day," she said at last.

"Yes," said he, sinking into a chair as if her words had broken a spell, "about business for to-morrow. They always do a deal of buttonholing down here, you know, before a meeting. Everything is usually settled before the Council meets."

"I won't ask how it's settled, I won't," she said to herself; "he means me to, but I'd die sooner."

The doctor heard the door open and shut: she was gone.

"And that's how a woman helps you," he said, hugging himself savagely.

Wilmot went upstairs with her face oddly twisted in the light of the candle she was carrying. The blue, yellow-fringed circle shone on a sobbing face, though she made no sound.

"And that's how men put you out of court when business has to be done," she said to herself. "We mustn't sit on councils, and we mayn't say a word about the education

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of girls, and we mayn't even know whether they're going to stand up to what's against them or not."

She placed her candle on the table and stood looking out of the uncurtained window of her room with eyes that saw nothing. Her eyes were wide like a sleepwalker's. "He treats me," she thought, "like a silly cow-woman, and her he'd kiss—and he turns his back on me!"

"Wilmot, you fool!" she said aloud, with a backward sweep of her hand that extinguished the candle. She had hurt her hand in dashing it against the looking-glass, and she stood, sobbing childishly with the wounded member pressed against her lips. Then she began groping for the matches, but they had taken to themselves wings, so, darkling, the day ended for her.

And below the doctor thought he was deciding, but it was not of lead pipes nor of chemical tests that he was thinking. It was probable, this he recognized, that if he stood out for his own verdict against the lead-pipes, somehow he would lose his public offices, but it was not of his career that he was thinking mainly.

"Pish!" he exclaimed, setting down the glass of whisky with a clash that sent the liquid splashing over the brim, "a man in love is no more to be trusted with public interests than a madman. No wonder the Romans put the State first: they hadn't any woman's ambition to serve. They loved Chloe for fair fleshly reasons, without any thought of 'only to stand high in her account.'"

Here he lost himself in dreams: she would never love him—he could feel the black-framed mirror at his back still, more potent to his fancy than a death's-head at the feast to an ancient reveller—but, all the same, he could hear her low-voiced "Tony, how splendid!" see her eyes shining admiration on him. To gain that what would he not do? The dice were heavily loaded. And, after all, it was no

crime, nothing at worst but an error of judgment, in a matter on which experts might differ. It needed no expert to foretell the typhoid and low feverish conditions that must continue to recur with the present wells. Who was he to say that a possible lead-poisoning was worse than a certain typhoid or enteric?

It was all clear to Wilmot as she lay awake, longing to go to him and speak of what she wanted him to do, of what she knew. All the while she recognized perfectly that she would never stir a hand to influence him. For although she dreaded to leave him alone to his decision, there seemed to be no honour to him if she influenced him one way or the other. Only let him this once show strength, refuse to take the easy way and acquiesce in the dangerous second-best, for the sake of a little vain-glory at getting his way in a measure. She saw more clearly even than he what it would mean—the Board would do as it pleased, of course; he might have to resign—and fail, apparently fail.

It was in that apparent failure that she based all her hopes of finding him a hero, just the one power she longed to find in him, unattractive as he was to her in some ways.

Out of her calculations, however, she left the only thing that mattered—Tony's longing to "stand high in her account," his fear of her scorn at outward failure; for he thought her ignorant of the real question, or so careless that she had never asked or talked much of the matter. Above and below they both watched the hours of that night, with barriers other than lath and plaster between them.

Dr. Borlace had often said of himself that he had no faith, and by faith he meant more than the creed of a theologian. To him there had been in poetry naught but illusion; in religion, but mania; in love, but race instinct. In short, no mystery anywhere, from the first rising of the sun to the last setting thereof.

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Now he was aghast at the mystery of his own feelings towards his wife ; analyse them as he might there still remained a residuum which his intellect could not explain. His darting flashes of anger at her indifference—that he derived easily enough from savage instincts ; even his desire to stand high in her estimation might be mere “ peacockery,” due to the same power that paints the cock pheasant’s feathers.

But whence this other desire that lay below “ peacockery ” —this desire to give her the satisfaction she asked for, to direct all his powers as she would have him, and to make her life with him a beautiful thing that satisfied her everywhere. These things savoured, indeed, of the spiritual, and the doctor had no faith. But there comes from time to time, to both commoners and kings, a writing on the wall.

Yet he only half read it, after all, for he took her outlook for narrower than it was. In the usual man’s thought of a woman’s view, he thought she could not look higher than the merely personal. What could the health of Challacombe matter to her beside her man’s triumph ? Moreover, the conflict between public duty and private desire never comes in simple form. For a man of his nature it was impossible to stem the tide of opinion, since the difficulty is never circumstance, always temperament.

The doctor returned home next day from the Council, trying to realize that the object of long strife was gained. He had often before wondered what it would be to lay one’s hand on a long-toiled-for treasure, often asked whether one would be satisfied with achievement ? And now he was merely a prey to doubts, through which every now and then there flashed a wonder that sent his blood whirling through his veins. Let a man toil for a boon ; with sudden accomplishment he will scarcely believe in his own deed.

There was a sunken look on his face as he leant back in a chair by Wilmot’s tea-table.

"You're very tired, Tony," she said gently, as she placed a cup of tea by his side.

Her heart was beating to merry music, for the tired look must mean that he had met opposition and outward failure. He must have been true to his guns. She stooped over to put the hair from his forehead.

The doctor quickly opened his eyes and caught her left hand as she touched him lightly.

"You'll live it down, Tony," said she, gently. "Let them go against you. We'll live it down together, in fact. Let's snap our fingers in the face of the whole crew. I begin to feel the lust of battle already."

She was feeling immeasurably brighter than she had done since the summer. Her faith in him was justified.

He suddenly left the table and sat down in the window-seat. What was it that she wanted? he asked in sickening doubt. At his back she was holding Diogenes high in air, and addressing terms of endearment to him, as he vainly endeavoured to aim a kick with his hind legs at her face.

"Dearest darling," she cooed to the ungrateful beast. The rest was lost in long smacking kisses.

The moment was a purgatorial one to the doctor.

"But," he said, in harsh, dry tones, "there's nothing to fight about; I'm in port at last, for I've won. The water will be in Challacombe in a few months' time."

He felt her hand tremble as she laid it on his shoulder, but she stood quite still, looking down into his face.

"And at what price?" she asked in a low, half-shamed voice.

"Bless me," he said pettishly, standing up, "the contracts aren't out yet. You're a little previous, I should say."

"I meant," she said, sitting down at her table and touching the handle of her cup with a hand she would not raise for its trembling—"I meant, what pipes will they use?"

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"What is customary, of course, iron mains with lead house pipes."

Inwardly, he was asking himself how she could have known. Outwardly calm, he stood up and drank his tea at a gulp, as if on the point of going.

"Are you pleased?" she asked, looking away towards the open window to hide her eyes that were full of quick-darting tears.

"Damn it all, Wilmot," he burst out, "does a man generally feel pleased or not when he has gained what he has been working for in the face of every kind of opposition? You know what this matter means to me, and you ask if I'm pleased."

The next moment she was alone.

"Oh, Uncle Richard must have told me wrong," she cried under her breath; "he cannot have felt so strongly about it or he wouldn't talk like this now." Any port in a storm: any supposition rather than the acknowledgment that he had weakly yielded.

He must have other evidence that had brought him to another decision, she thought, but all the time she knew she dared not ask; it was better to doubt than to show suspicion or to get an answer that would only kill suspicion to give birth to certainty.

Dr. Tony sat heavily down at his writing-table where the light from the window fell across his face; it disturbed him so that he leant over the desk with his face on his hands.

"Somebody's told her everything," he said under his breath. "My God!" cried Dr. Tony, to the Force men disprove in calm, yet call upon in agony, "my God! what a fool I've been, talking of contracts to a woman not yet thirty—a woman made for love, with a husband that she fears!"

There was no sound in the room save the sudden jolting of a cart over the cobbles outside.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE DUST OF THE ARENA

THE winter was past, and in the combe that runs seawards just beyond the Challacombe valley a finger of sunlight pierced the larch wood, quivering into the brown depths with a throb. A shower of golden rain swept the pools amid the boulders, pools warm with the sunlight that, filtering ghost-like through the trees, blazed full on the river in the valley bottom. After the sunbeam danced Elizabeth, bare-backed and gleaming from her dip in the brown water. She shook a shower of drops from the hair that, corn-colour at the tips, in the depths was living chestnut. Through the afternoon heat the child cub, with gnome-like head crowning a barrel-shaped body, pursued the silent sunbeam, that danced to the piping of an invisible Pan, as, with goat-feet hidden in the stream and never a leer on his old face, the earth god watched the flash of child limbs against the dim background of wilder nature. Seen so, for all the Pan pipes, the veined marble of white limbs, that holds life and death like the red earth itself, was born of spirit, no less than body.

Something of this reached Johanna as she waited for her child to tire of play. It was her habit, whenever she could get away for an hour or two, to bring Elizabeth out of the courtyard where she was kept at nurse for a dip in the river, or the sea. For Johanna, like a cautious general, calculated every possible chance of defeat, and she knew well enough that fresh air and water count as much as food itself in the chances of child life.

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An hour later she stood at the entrance to the courtyard where the child was lodged. On the sill of a broken-paned window opposite her a yellow cat, one-eyed and mangy, moaned a love-song to another inside the window, while a group of children, fingers on lips, watched the love-sick pair in pity; and a fisherman, with rings in his ears, grinned from the background at the group. The human tide surged backwards and forwards in the airless court, shut in by tall houses full of voices and the clatter of pots and pans. Banners of drying clothes fluttered from great rods that projected high overhead from the tall walls that shut out light and air and left the smell of poverty triumphant. There poured down from a window a torrent of curses, half inarticulate, yet by that the more suggestive of hate, like the glimpse of a horrible sight through a half-opened door. Johanna hurried into the room on the ground floor below. It was very dim within, as only a room can be when the sun is almost always excluded, but the white hair of Mrs. Alward, Elizabeth's nurse-mother, caught the light with a silver gleam.

"Shut the door quickly," she said hurriedly; "she's been like this all the afternoon. I hope she didn't catch sight of 'ee, or her'll carry on worse than ever."

"Me!" said Johanna, indignantly. "Well, I've never had any colloquing with the likes of Mrs. Grose, I should hope, her that Dr. Borlace won't give a death certificate for another cheeld, and that I heard 'en say myself."

"That's just what's fired her same as she's been to-day. There isn't a word bad enough for her to lay tongue to that her hasn't called the doctor. For her eldest boy's bad, sure enough. They do say the doctor cut too low when he took off his leg, and they'll have to cut higher again, or he'll die. Mortifying, by what I hear tell. And there's not one of the Groses will so much as lay a finger on him to nurse him.



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The doctor and sister's done everything. And you're in it too, for they say if 'twasn't for the doctor, you'd have been back with your father, all comfortable. For they say you're not the same woman you was afore you was took up by the quality, and with not a word to throw to your old friends, not even your father. And, they say, there's decent girls that haven't got places so good as yours."

"I didn't think, Mrs. Alward, to hear this from you," said Johanna, rapping her arm across the table.

"I'm only telling 'ee what they say. And Jim's going downhill fast, they say; and, for all he knocked 'ee about a bit, you're the only one can do anything with 'en. For he'd never been scandalized before, same as he was about you."

"I'll tell 'ee this: what Jim is, he's made himself. And what my maid will be is in my hands. For Jim's life is half over, anyway, and hers is only just beginning. Risk her, to put out a finger to help him? No, not I, not from the very fire itself!"

Mrs. Alward was soon talked down, for she had but spoken as cat's-paw to Johanna's father, who bitterly regretted the loss of a very useful daughter. Mrs. Alward, indeed, found Joe Buckingham quite an addition to her income, since he was willing to pay her for occasional hints to Johanna that she would be welcome back again in the old haunts. For Johanna herself resolutely refused to speak to him.

"But what's this about the doctor and poor Pharaoh Grose? How can they cut the poor chap's leg higher, if there's nobody to tend to him?"

"He's to be took away, and it's that as set up Mrs. Grose, for they say he'll take poor Pharaoh and cut 'en to pieces, same as he's done afore now with dead bodies."

Then, with a sudden flash of insight, as when the sculptor first releases the statue that, thrall'd in the marble

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block, awaited his coming, on Johanna there darted a perception of the meaning of this man's life, of its meaning to her, if to none other. For suddenly, erring and trivial as he might seem, Dr. Tony came to her in the great guise of one who serves. And surely the destiny of man must be a great one, if only for the majesty of the men who have been its servants. Johanna knew nothing of the long roll of these servants of man, its statesmen, thinkers, and martyrs, but the winds of the spirit are lawless, and wait for no knowledge. For the moment she saw the doctor's puny efforts to fight ignorance in that light which alone can lift human life above the gathering shadows of age and the coming silence of death.

She flushed and paled as she stood holding her child's shoulder, magnifying the trivial in the wizard power of the idealist. The next instant the woman in her rushed in, and with it the knowledge of her own position and its helplessness. With the knowledge came the wild revolt of a half-savage nature, for she was a peasant woman, to whom the tame acquiescence of the parlour-bred is foreign. Born in other times, Johanna would have held a barricade, but, failing barricades, there are always the ten commandments, even in the most piping times of peace.

Making her way down the cobbled pathway from the court to the High Street, she stood for a moment where the road curved upwards on the other side of the valley. The navvies were working there on the embankment of the new railway line, using flares of light in the coming dimness of the May light. The clouds caught a russet gleam from the smoke belched forth by a stationary engine, and against the background of light, dun figures passed across the lighted space and disappeared in the surrounding darkness. Somehow the drab shapes seemed ominous, so quickly their fluttering was over, so little did it matter how they played

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their part, so sure was the gathering darkness to which they passed.

Suddenly two girls standing in a doorway nudged each other and burst into shrill peals of laughter as Johanna passed; the blood flamed fiercely in her cheeks, and she resolutely turned on her heel, back to the court where her child lived. Finding Mrs. Alward's room empty but for the sleeping Elizabeth, she lighted a candle, and holding her face to the little looking-glass on the wall, gazed at the marks of hard living, the long wrinkles from nostrils to lips, a grey hair or two: the things that stand for the passing of bodily delight.

Fiercely she shook out her hair, till it rose in a semi-circle round her temples, fiercely she flung a cheap lace collar round her neck. She was sorry as she passed the doorstep where the girls had laughed that they had disappeared. This was the only feeling she had at all. The righteous universe that had made it so hard to walk straight was kickable. Johanna would kick it to-night, in the only way possible to her class.

As she passed a brightly lit grocer's shop a jerseyed figure detached itself from a noisy group that filled the pavement. It was Jim Godbear, whom she had not seen since her flight, for he belonged to the North Sea fleet, that is often absent for six weeks at a time, and so she had easily avoided meeting him, for she always watched the *North Star's* times for being in port.

The group of men laughed as the two turned back up the dark road that leads to the headland, where he drew her down to a seat cut in the shelter of the cliff. The sea rocked the headlights of the boats up and down before her dazed eyes, till all the world seemed a haze of glow-worm lights. Still her mind rushed backwards and forwards in the search for the inner strength. In the past was

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what she had sworn to herself; in the future, her child a woman.

But the pattern of his jersey, the scent of shag about him, the unrazored chin that brushed her cheek—was it not all that the world would ever give her?

A second later she seemed to wake to a mockery, as from the corner of the quay the notes of "Hold the Fort" swelled out and died away over the sea. The exultant wave of it reached her tortured heart.

"Well, old woman, here we are again, all comfortable together," said Jim, cheerfully. "Hanged if it wasn't worth while going away a bit to come back to this. You'm pretty silent, but actions speak louder than words."

A lad swinging to and fro to the rhythm of his concertina passed close to their feet.

"I wish I was dead, I do," moaned Johanna. Then she tried to lash herself into a rage. "You broke my arm last time I seed 'ee."

"So I did. But I'd had a drop too much, and you angered me. I never touch a woman when I'm sober. But I thought I'd only to give a touch to the helm to fetch 'ee round right enough, and if you'd not been set against me by them that ought to ha' known better, you'd never have scandalized me same as you did. But I'll be upsides with that sneaking sawbones yet. He's none too well liked to Challacombe, I can tell 'ee. I dunno what the world's coming to, when a man can't——"

"Can't knock about a woman that doesn't, after all, belong to him," she said, keeping back her rage and shaking herself free. "When I come to myself 'twas all black darkness. There's others that may bring a cheeld up to my life as it was, but I can't. And as for you, for all you go about with decent women, that toss their heads at me, you'm no better than me. For you'm coward too, and that I'm

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not. You've had a decent upbringing yourself, but do you think you could give it to your cheeld and mine, Jim, when you but cursed the mother that bore her?"

"Damn it," he said sulkily, "what's the good of going on like this?"

"That's what I asked myself, when I come to see where I was, that I'd just got to fight for it with my two bare hands, to give it a fair chance of a life. Then he come, Dr. Borlace, to help me. 'Twas like bringing a lamp into a dark room. Nobody ever understood before, and nobody'd ever put themselves right down by the side of me before, like he did."

"A fancy man, by the looks of it, do put himself down there, I'll warn."

"That's a lie, and you know it."

She stood square with her arms crossed, like a Caryatid; flashing above the degradation was the majesty of the woman.

"My Heavens, isn't there anything upon earth that you and me and the likes of us can touch without spoiling?"

The shrill termagant of the street corner sprang up in her the next second for all the self-mastery she had been learning.

"Take back that word," she said, and suddenly struck him across the mouth, as she faced him with heaving breast.

"Oh," she cried, "strike back! I'm a woman, but as strong as you be now. I wasn't the last time."

But he was silent, like a man who hears the sound of the falling bricks all round him—the bricks of his own castle in Spain; for men like Jim build fancy castles, though of brick, not marble. The sense of property was very strong in him.

Johanna was found by her mistress half an hour later, lying with her arms stretched across the kitchen table.

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"What is it?" asked Wilmot, laying a hand on the heaving shoulder. "Is anything wrong with the child—with Elizabeth?"

"I've not been with her; I've been with her father instead. Oh, it's well to be you; your cheeld 'll bide in the same house with you. You'll see it day and night; mine I've to steal to when I can get an hour. Here's the sort of clothes my cheeld's got to wear."

She struck a little heap of rough calico that lay on the table.

"Yours 'll have lace," she continued; "and shan't I have a man, anyway? Why is everybody to have summat but me? And there's him." Wilmot had no need to ask whom; Johanna never spoke of any one in quite the same tone as she used of the doctor. "I heard you laughing together, when I was sweeping the stair—you and him—for all he's sore plagued with Challacombe ways."

Wilmot turned to the fire with a crimson face. The woman must go, for although the whole household rested on her, she spied; she brought evil frankness into the house, like mud from the streets.

"Oh yes, I'll go fast enough," said Johanna, answering her thought; "but before I go, there's one thing I mean you shall know, though it's putting my hand between the chopper and the board to talk of it."

Painting in the vivid country fashion that spares no details, she told her mistress the story of the lad wrongly operated on, the gangrene, and the hatred of the Grose family.

"But, my dear soul, I'm telling up a lot of old trade," she said at last, in a gentler tone, for Wilmot's whiteness betrayed her.

"They will take him to the hospital at Regiswear, I suppose," said the doctor's wife.

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"Too far; he'd die upon the way."

"Then he must be brought here, and we'll nurse him."

"You," said Johanna; "why, the doctor wouldn't let 'ee touch him—and reason good, too; but I'll tend 'en, and thank'ee for letting me."

So the two women, glowing, one with penitence and the other with gratitude, made their simple plans.

And the doctor agreed. Wilmot never forgot the sudden, moved look he turned upon her. It seemed, indeed, that he had thought of this plan, but had scarcely dared to propose it. Then Wilmot remembered that before his marriage the house at Dashpers had been a sort of refuge for derelict human beings, mostly children of struggling old friends, who wanted sea air.

So the lad, Pharaoh Grose, was brought there at once, and Johanna entered on the work, which to a trained nurse would have been repellent. That night the consulting-room was brilliantly lit by all the lamps that could be procured, fixed round the table to which the lad had been carried: it was an operating-table brought from Regiswear that morning, for Dr. Borlace had roused himself to send for a surgeon and make an effort to save the lad's life by removing the thigh, hoping in that way to prevent the gangrene rising higher. Wilmot watched the trained nurse who had arrived with the doctor moving round the brightly lit room. She kept her eyes fixed on the two doctors, who stood talking in a low voice in the window.

She could only see her husband's face, and on it she read the drama that was passing, as one gazing into a crowded room through a chink which only revealed two figures—but those the central ones.

In heavy, set determination she saw Dr. Borlace return again and again to the charge: he was trying every argument, using every appeal, with a life-and-death earnestness, that

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but grew at every shrug of refusal from his colleague, the surgeon summoned to operate. What was it? she asked herself. She could see in the taut lines of the only face visible to her that it meant—more than life or death to him, the chance to retrieve an act of misjudgment.

Coming out suddenly, Johanna, who had been helping the nurse, shut the door firmly behind her, and drew her mistress upstairs.

“What is it, Johanna?” she gasped.

“He’s a coward, an infernal coward,” said Johanna, in low, earnest tones, for the emotional tension in the men had aroused her passion.

“Who?”

“The other man—the man the doctor sent for. Oh, if he’d but been a man, they might ha’ saved the lad, and Dr. Tony wouldn’t never have had to feel he’d killed ‘em.”

She had so entirely identified herself with the doctor, that she forgot how she was putting the worst case before her mistress. There certainly was in Dr. Tony the magnetic power which causes one person to fill the stage.

“But why? Why won’t he?”

“Oh, not enough light to see by. Must be daylight, or electric. Can’t do it with lamps. My Heavens! he don’t want to see him die under his hands, that’s what *that* means.”

“But why not Tony?”

Johanna understood. “One couldn’t do it, they say, there’s so many arteries to tie, and ’tother chap won’t stir a finger till daylight.”

But the curtain of merciful darkness went down over Wilmot, and from her faint she only recovered to enter into the struggle for her child’s life and her own.

The doctor who had been summoned only to give a death sentence, had the affair of a new life on his hands, and before dawn Pharaoh Grose was dead and the new life



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come. In fact, another humbler life, too, was gone, for Diogenes had to be mercifully restored to Nirvana by the doctor's own hands. The anger of Challacombe and of the Grose family being by no means appeased by the doctor's care for the dead lad, every dependent of the Dashpers household must be made to suffer for its connection with it—and the first to suffer was Diogenes.

In the days of boxing matches, the natural venom of man's nature was excreted from his system by the honest breaking of noses or blacking of eyes, but now insulting postcards or "injunctions to restrain," the postal system or the lawyer's office, are the feeble means of clearing the inflamed system of its hate, for no civilization has yet succeeded in making man anything but a peculiarly aggravating creature to his own kind.

Now, Challacombe was midway between these two methods, and, understanding the system of neither, could allow its crowd to maul the captain of the *Fear Naught*, without calling for man to man and fair play; and, on the other hand, could stoop to petty persecution of Dr. Borlace. There are but two ways of holding such an outpost on the boundaries of civilization as Challacombe, and those are, either to be a saint with a strong dash of heroism, or a "substantial" man, with a pronounced inclination to autocracy and an eye to one's bank balance. Unfortunately, Dr. Borlace was neither, but all things by turns and nothing long. Sometimes devoted, he often neglected his cases, and the neglect was noted and not the devotion. Above all, his science was aggressive among minds inaccessible to the arguments of the microscope, his crowning misdemeanour being the closing of the ancient "pipe-well," famed for its coldness—and yet polluted. For in Challacombe, germs, instead of being hoary iniquities, were new-fangled, and with flippant tongue and careless manners the doctor fought

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the germs of the slums and the smugness of the parlours, not without a threatened rise in the rates, for the new water-supply.

Absorbed just now in the wonder of her own life, Wilmot viewed, as from the spectators' gallery, her husband's conflict in the arena, and the slackening of moral fibre, which she suspected to have been the result of his lowered standard of public responsibility, for in the bustle of the town over the contracts for the new water-supply she saw but the fatal evidence of her husband's weakness. They had never referred again to the question of the lead-piping, though Wilmot, in secret, read every word of the Reports of the Council's proceedings, and listened for every echo of the district's opinion, though she felt herself raised far above the press of struggle, in some watch-tower of feminine superiority: unfortunately, however, the watch-tower is a fatal position for a wife.

It has chanced to most of us, standing within the gloom of some tall tower, to look down on the expanse of country below us, to watch the smoke rising from factory chimneys and household fires, and to catch a glimpse of the girdle of distant hills. Seen thus, each part of the picture is but the complement of the rest, and the roar of the factory, the dust of the road, and the toilsome ascent of the hills, bring no more weariness than do the meadow-paths themselves—to the watcher in the tower, who views not the difficulty of the life, but the ease of it. It is a Pisgah-sight, but a permanent residence on Pisgah is not advisable for a wife, unless her husband happens to be a Moses.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A ROMAN'S PART

THE light rose slowly up the wall of the room, like the shaft of a golden searchlight. Thrilling with the nervous life of returning health, Wilmot awoke to happy consciousness of the sunshine and to the wonderful power over the future that slept in the cradle beside her. With the blood burning in her face and tightly interlocked limbs she watched the radiance that widened and narrowed with the rise and fall of the blind in the wind. She remembered her old student's room, pasted with algebraical formulæ and Latin verb parts. In those days she used to begin her day by waking Uncle Dickie with a series of flying leaps from mat to mat on the polished floor, as she balanced herself on bare pink toes.

It was good to remember those wholesome days just now, as she slipped a finger under the baby's sleeve to feel its wonderful skin. In the passion of that sudden glory she laughed aloud, for back along the ages the spirit of the dear dead women thrilled in her again at the baby touch, warm with life and the promise of it, yet old with the very woody savour of the tree of life. How foolish the man seemed who talked of the "waxen" touches of a baby: it took a man to say anything so ignorant as that. For now she knew one at least of the three touches in which flesh speaks plainly: the waxen cold of death that awaits dissolution, the burning warmth of new life, the clasp of passion that with thundering shock brings soul to soul.

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It was said by a Roman philosopher that the gods cannot busy themselves in mortal affairs, lest the turmoil of the market-place should disturb even the divine serenity of the dwellers on Olympus. It would seem that mortals, too, are often born with that temperament. In such people, as in persons born with one skin short, a touch is a bruise; the mere neighbourhood of spite, vulgarity, and crudity is like a spiritual blow to their sensibility. Such a temperament is, indeed, far enough from the divine—as far, in fact, as the gods of Olympus themselves from the altitude of Calvary.

Yet the extra skin that shall clothe the quivering nerves can be found. Wilmot had apparently found it in Avis, her little bird, that was going to lift her mother's life out of the rut of low achievement. For the moment the child's touch had driven away from her notice the noisy neighbourhood of the poor houses at the back of Dashpers, that usually brought to her ears all the sordid noises of squalid awakening: this dawn, at any rate, was unsmirched. Smirched, that is, by nothing save a memory of how she had mocked at Tony yesterday, in a sudden fit of bitterness.

The housekeeping money had sunk to a vanishing quantity, but she had determined to give the doctor a lesson. On returning to the midday meal, Dr. Borlace lifted the cover from the dish only to discover two pilchards, a fish he positively loathed, reposing on a layer of mashed potatoes.

"What's the meaning of this?" he shouted.

"Two shillings for housekeeping won't run to roast beef," said his preceptress, sweetly, "and pilchards are very wholesome after all. Anyway, we must learn to live on them as other poor people do."

"What kind of creature are you turning out on my hands, Wilmot?"

"Really, Tony, you are amusing to watch. Perhaps in time you will become really steady-going. I've been studying you lately; it's a most interesting course of observation."

"Don't do it," roared he, champing the highly flavoured food that his soul abhorred. "I won't be put under a microscope. It's positively indecent, I tell you, to botanize and geologize over a husband."

It appeared, however, that the housekeeping money would not again fall below five shillings at any one time of asking, but the memory of her mockery scorched her now.

Johanna, coming in with the early tea, suddenly became a personality, whose circumstances were of some import to her mistress.

"Johanna," she asked, leaning on her elbow to take the tray, "has your baby a pretty cot like mine?"

"No," she answered proudly; "she's much too small for any little chit of a cot. She takes a bed."

Wilmot laughed, for she understood the instinct of glorification that had suggested the answer.

"I'm going to fetch Elizabeth to see baby to-day. She's a gay creature, is your Elizabeth. The doctor says there isn't another child like her in the whole of Challacombe."

"And she sleeps in a padded cube sugar-box," said Johanna, quietly.

"I know, I know. Somehow baby has begun to teach me everything. Johanna, I can't imagine how you manage to pay your way. You pay five shillings a week for Elizabeth, that's thirteen pounds a year, and we only pay you fourteen pounds. She must have long ago grown out of the clothes Miss Penaluna gave her too."

"I've learnt to make clothes; you paid for me to do that."

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Johanna had all a Frenchwoman's capacity for practical life. She kept the house spotless, learnt to cook at odd chances, a dish at a time, curry from William, cakes from Miss Penaluna's maid. But, with all her skill, there was a gulf that would not be bridged in her economies.

"I suppose I ought to have told, but when I've been using your sewing-machine, it wasn't all for my own sewing. I made a blouse for Miss Dorothy's Sarah, and she's paid me for it."

"You put me to shame, Johanna. You fight so all day and every hour."

"My dear life, I'll wear my fingers to the bone, but I won't go down. Some says to me, 'Go back to the old way and live like a sensible woman and be comfortable.' But I says, 'Thank'ee, but I've been an honest woman now for many a day.' For 'tis like the boys when they're after gulls' eggs, a foot here and a hand there, and so—up."

This explained the woman's thrift; in the battle of such as Johanna, the sixpence saved by much care is just a foot-hold—up.

As Wilmot sat that morning over the unpaid bills, the sunlight outside turned the air opaque with tawny gold. Then the gold shifted to a murky brown that made the outlines of the piers grow faint and wavering, though it was noon. The shouts of the men from the anchored fleet were muffled and the strike of the church clock was portentous. As the tide turned, the smell of weed drifted across the valley of house-roofs. It was high summer and stiflingly hot, but the doctor remained out all day, for the town was as sickly as the fog that the incoming trawlers reported to be gathering in the Channel as thick as a blanket.

All day the weight of the clammy mist, the knowledge of the unpaid bills, the consciousness of the atmosphere of

dislike that surrounded her, pressed closer and closer on Wilmot. For Dashpers was fast becoming a beleaguered fortress, and to pay an afternoon call assumed the importance of a sortie by the garrison into the enemy's country. She felt glad to shut behind her the front door into the street, and to find herself in the peaceful shadow of the hall, with its long window of coloured glass and the thick walls that shut out the malicious spite of Challacombe. For now during the last three months scarcely one of the better-class people had called in the doctor; every one went to the helpless old Dr. Earwaker, now long past his work.

Wilmot awoke that night with what she thought at first was the roaring of siege guns, but which proved to be the noise of a rushing wind that battered the house of Dashpers as with a ram and blew the curtains of her window straight across the room. Hoarse shouts and the rush of nail-boots came up to her from the street below. As with hammering heart she held her watch to the night-light she saw that it was a few minutes past midnight, then she caught a shouted sentence: "There's a tidal wave running, and the wind behind it." The sultry yellow haze had brought fresh trouble to the town, for up the lower courts and wynds that abutted on the quay the wave would rush, leaving a foul deposit behind in the alleys and houses. Dashpers was on the hill far above the danger, but it was impossible to lie still in this turmoil, for beyond the battering shocks of wind that broke like great guns on the walls, there was the subdued roar of waters.

As she opened the door into the staircase she had a sudden sense of loneliness, and yet gazing over the stairhead she saw a line of light across the hall from the back sitting-room. Johanna slept in the rear of the house, up a separate staircase quite cut off from the rest of the house, but the doctor must be sitting up late, as he often did.

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Wilmot stole softly down the stairs and pushed open the door, but the room was empty. As she stood trying to turn up the lamp to a brighter blaze, a key was inserted in the front door. It was Dr. Borlace and another man, and as they stood in the hall for a few minutes while the doctor lit the hall-lamp, she found her retreat upstairs cut off. Above the storm of rain and wind that even sounded at the back of the house, the roar of waters from the sea was like an echo of sound ; above all there was something electric in the air to-night, something that thrilled the waiting nerves like a sudden summons to the unseen will.

"It's not enough," she heard the doctor's voice saying. He spoke loudly, for he imagined that Wilmot was safely asleep in her own room.

"Not enough, sir?" said the other in husky tones, that were penetrating for all the hesitating catch of the voice ; it was a distinctive voice that a listener would always recognize. "I can't make it more, for I've offered more now than us will well know how to find. But help us must have for the lad if he's to weather to-night."

"He must be knocked to bits." The doctor spoke petulantly, Wilmot thought. "He'll die anyway, if what you say is true about the accident. I'm not going to risk my life to get to a patient that's probably beyond all human skill even by now."

"We risked ours, me and my mates, to get in and fetch help, and we didn't ask a brass farden for it, nuther." But for a slow sort of surprise the speaker's tone would have been truculent.

"The sea is your element, it isn't mine," said Dr. Borlace, beginning in an explanatory tone, and then breaking off into the shrug she knew well, which so often prefaced a piece of brutal candour in him ; "and, anyway, what you offer wouldn't be enough to make it worth my



while to go out to the *Iskjoelder* to-night, even if I could do any good by going, which I have told you is impossible."

The *Iskjoelder*, "ice-house," was the ice-boat that in the days before the manufacture of artificial ice in Challacombe brought in supplies from Norway. There must have been an accident aboard and Tony was refusing . . . but she stopped herself suddenly, for in the roar of wind and sea the house of life itself seemed invaded. At the opening of the front door the outside world had darted into her scheme of thought. Out there was no longer the Challacombe that hated and scoffed and persecuted, but the Challacombe that asked for help and got it, thanks or no thanks, in the person of this unknown sailor-lad. It is the greatest revelation that life has to offer—the sense of help due—and it comes in a lightning flash that sears the consciousness into life.

"That's your last word then?" said the husky voice of the second speaker, his oilskins rustling as he moved in preparation for departure. "You won't risk a bit of a sea, and it's no use my going to Dr. Earwaker, he's too old for a job like this."

"Tut, man, don't stand blethering there, I tell you. My life's too valuable to be thrown away for a useless bit of folly. Just step in here a minute; you'd better take back something I can show you how to use."

Wilmot heard the man enter the consulting-room, then the doctor came slowly down the hall, and entered the dining-room, which led into the surgery.

"Wilmot," he said, in amazement, "what are you doing here at this time of night?"

"Tony," she answered, swiftly closing the hall-door behind them, "you must go to the *Iskjoelder* to-night. I heard every word, and I say you must go. You'll think I have no right to speak like this."

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She was quivering with a restless thrill of nerve power that filled the room with the sense of battle.

"Certainly, I do say it. It is a perfectly unwarrantable interference. Pah! why do I stay here talking folly with a mad woman?"

"Tony, it was you who risked your life for a child not so long ago. If you were wanted for a lifeboat it wouldn't be your business, but this is. This is your business; illness, disease *is* your business, Tony." She took him by the lapels of his coat.

"Oh," he said slowly, "that's your point, is it? I'm afraid, that's it, I suppose. You are behaving very foolishly, Wilmot. This is a mere hysterical fit, in which you richly deserve to feel miserable. You first listen to a professional conversation in which you had no possible concern. You then decide for yourself on a matter of professional etiquette on which you are quite unqualified to judge, and you naturally make yourself miserable and probably ill."

"It is a matter of life and death where you have a dangerous thing to do—and you chaffer about the price."

He started as if he had been stung, then he said bitterly—

"And only this morning you sat with the bills unpaid before you." Then, as she would have spoken, he went on, "Wait a minute, please. There are three possible reasons for my refusal: first, I am a coward—that's your interpretation; second, I am not called upon to run a professional risk, like a smallpox case, but the non-professional one of the sea; and third, my life is a valuable one—one that stands between . . ."

"Don't bring me in, please."

"Pardon me, I was not going to do so. I meant that you are putting this poor chap's life before the health of hundreds."

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"Quibbles, quibbles—and you know it. Another could do your work to the hundreds; there's only one here to-night to do this work—and that's you."

Her passion infected him: grasping her wrists he drew her to look in his eyes. There were strange doubts in him now, not of himself, but of her. Was it her freedom that she was bidding for, with all the intensity of an evangelist? But no; there was nothing but the truth that convinced, in her eyes.

"Tony," she said, sobbing, "for our child's sake, not for a two-halfpenny sentiment as you take it to be, I want you to go. She has a foolish, helpless mother; let us give her a father that's quixotic if you like, but that does not fail the weak. For Avis, Tony. Give her the best inheritance we can. Tony, I want you to be splendid."

"And I'm only a business man, that wants to do a plain day's work in peace. But, as you're so anxious to be a widow, I'll go with the mate of the *Iskjoelder*. And the less said about it the better."

The next thing she heard was the shiver of his oilskins as he dragged them from the cupboard in the wall; they had belonged to his North Sea equipment, in the days when he had been the doctor on the mission-boat. As she stood wondering whether it was delight at her own victory or a faint germ of contempt at his pliability that possessed her, Dr. Borlace began to laugh, as he drew the oilies over his trousers—

"This must be in answer to the prayers of the sky-pilots. Did I ever tell you how they held a prayer-meeting for my conversion?"

He was wondering at the moment which of the three motives he had mentioned had really been uppermost in his mind. He thought he knew, however, as he found it gave him a physical qualm to remember the state of the Channel

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waves in the bay outside. Free from that mental picture he was as gay as a lark now, for the bird in his breast sang "What a fine fellow I am!" as gaily as any parrot that ever whistled "Pop goes the weasel."

Then the door banged, and Wilmot heard again, in the complete stillness of the house, the roar of the maddened elements. Up and down, up and down between the furniture of the consulting-room, which she had pushed aside to make a lane for her restless march, she was walking when a tap came at the window. It was Captain Penrice, who, having been aroused, had seen the light from the window of Dashpers. She pulled him into the house.

"I've sent Tony out to the *Iskjoelder*," she said. "He went without a word of good-bye, for I drove him away, and now I'd give anything if I'd never said what I did. But he wouldn't have gone without me, and I can never forgive myself. For he won't get back. The mate hardly thought they would. He fetched Tony."

"Whew!" said the captain; then he changed his tactics. "Well," he said, "he'll be a bit damp before he gets in, and the doctor doesn't like sea-sickness, but I wouldn't fret myself to fiddlestrings over that, if I were you."

"Uncle Dickie," she said bitterly, "you know there's danger. It's only a lie to talk like that."

"And if there was, he had to go, and you knew that when you sent him."

"I'm glad you've said that," she said softly to herself. "I can bear it better now."

As the sugar melting in water is not seen, but is perceptible in the after-draught, so distrust in the truth of her own instincts had been inflaming the bitterness of the physical dread that shrank in her with each fresh boom of the wind. Drearily the day broke. Johanna brought her a cup of tea, and whispered a word that she would look after

Avis that morning. And still the pacing up and down continued, while Johanna forced herself, as stronger natures will, to keep her thoughts on the daily work. For the captain had himself slipped out to warn her not to express surprise at anything unusual in the affairs of the household.

In her walk, as the light strengthened, Wilmot caught sight of herself in the glass. With a queer gasp she saw what she would look like years hence, when the woman's province of power and life would have gone from her. She paused in an access of self-pity; for would she not always dwell outside the splendid kingdom of the romance for which her heart burnt? For outside the portals she seemed, even as surely as Miss Penaluna, outside the portals of the real woman's life, though her husband and child might live in the house with her. Standing there in the midst of the moaning of the storm, she asked herself of the key. Why could she not turn it? It was not denied to her hand as it was to Miss Dorothy—and yet, she was further from it than ever Miss Penaluna would be, for all her whitening hair and yellowing skin.

An hour or two later the doctor softly closed the front door behind him, his oilskins dripping in the half gloom as he advanced beneath the lancet window. Somewhere a newly lighted fire was crackling. The air was full of the homely scent of burning wood, and the square deep-set place seemed to have the peace of a cavern. He was tired and worn to the last degree, and his day's work yet to come was a hard one, for the coast was strewn with wreckage, the work of the night's gale, and a ship was ashore off Mudstone Beach. But the heart of him was aglow with the sense of the hard press of battle endured, and warm also with the new kindness in his rough patients' voices.

Then the door behind him opened, and he turned with a start.

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After the rude forms of the trawlers he saw the fluffy gown, the lithe slimness of Wilmot's delicate body; he savoured the feminine grace of it all, he scented it as a horse will the sweetness of clover. He even loved the quaint clumsiness as she tried to run to him in the long folds of her robe. Then, as he caught her under his oil-skins, dripping as they were, he laughed—

“The crooked sixpence come back, as crooked sixpences will, you see, old girl.”

Somewhere by the side of them a door banged noisily. It was Johanna, as with white drawn face, she went back to her swift, breathless preparation of a meal, for everywhere in this strange world the feast of life is laid for some, while the starving look on. This woman had everything, said Johanna to herself, reverence, respect, passionate loyalty—and idly risked it all, over and over again, for a whim.

But the doctor wrinkled his eye-corner wrinkles in delight, and felt himself very much “up in the bough.” He would have felt himself, in his masculine vanity, on the very top leaf of the tree, if he had only known how these two women made the household turn round him.

But fortunately, else were life impossible for women on this planet at all, there is a merciful veil of blindness over the perception of the male.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE GATES OF THE GOLDEN CITY

THE chapel was full of the scent of roses and "boys' love," not untainted with that of soap and hair-oil. The preaching of Captain Penrice was a fearful joy to most, especially to the guilty consciences, for he practised a certain species of sharp-shooting amongst the congregation, the writhing victims of which were watched by the rest of the audience with a glee not unmingled with dread.

"To-night," he began, "I am not going to speak from any text in special, unless it be 'Life—and Death,' and that's a text you'll scarcely find just so, in the pages of the old Book, though, to be sure, pretty nigh everything's that said there is about one or the other, Life or Death."

The last rustle ceased, mothers haft sleepy children closer, fathers stretched the last cramped muscle, girls ruffled plumes, and there was a tense silence, for the unmistakable note of power was present in the stifling, dim-lit tabernacle.

"Now, last night," he went on in conversational tones, "I saw a man carrying away a plank of wood from my timber-yard—a plank I'd neither sold nor given him. Carrying wood, that man, to build again the Cross of Christ, as all of us have done in our time. And that's the way that leads to Death."

The men looked at one another with the pursed-up faces of inquiry, while, in the dimness, one face sought no man's.

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"But before I go on, I should like to ask that man to slip round to-morrow to my yard and I'll give 'en enough planks to build the fowl-house, or such-like, that he thought he was building.

"But next I saw a woman with her dress pinned across the black bruise on her breast—a bruise given her by the man whose children she'd borne. And she was washing clothes over a steaming tub in a dripping cellar to keep body and soul together in those same children—and that was Life, or Love, for no man can tell one from t'other of those two. And between the two, Death and Life, or Self and Love, there's all our lives here and whatever there may be waiting for us on the other side.

"And you and I, come here from one or other, or, more like, from both. I mind hearing, when I was a boy, the preacher call out from the pulpit, 'There comes my wife, with a chest of drawers on her head.' For the woman wanted a new bonnet so sorely that she'd sold a chest of drawers to buy one. Now, we're all like that woman, for we've all done our foolish things to get for ourselves what wasn't worth having—one a fowl-house, and another a chest of drawers, and yet another the wherewithal to feed the lust that's in him, like the man that blacked his wife's breast. Now, I wonder if that man's here to-night?"

In the hush that followed, as the old man flashed his glance right and left, many held their breath. Then he shook his head.

"Ah, I see he's not here. That's a pity, for I had a message for him."

Captain Penrice was descended from at least one famous "devil-hunter" of the olden time, when revival meetings often ended in a stampede over the country in the rear of the demons possessed. Possibly this accounted for what was known in Challacombe as his "straight dealing."



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"Selling our heritage of love for a mess of the pottage of our lust: that's Challacombe, all over—lying, sneaking, tale-bearing, suspicious Challacombe, where the mud runs so thick you can scarce catch a glimpse of the cobbles. Why, there's no place out of hell itself that I wouldn't rather be in than Challacombe sometimes. And yet, I'm naught but Challacombe myself, too, for there's never a dirty deed done, or a low thought harboured in Challacombe, that I couldn't match in my own life. And there isn't a body or a soul, save the devil's himself, that I wouldn't sooner be in, sometimes, than my own. So having cleared decks, we'll now get to the matter I'd in mind to say.

"When I come here to-night I said to myself, 'Here be I, Richard Penrice, come from a comfortable meal and a quiet pipe, and with many more of them in prospect, both meals and pipes, till the call across the river sounds for me, and I'll no longer be in need of meals or pipes. And there they be, the men and women I'm to preach to, come, some of 'em, from a bit of bread and fish, and none too much of it, and with the fear of even that failing often and often in their minds. For I know there's many chaps that made but a bare six shillen a week back this winter that's past, and that with chillern to feed. Now, I can't feed 'ee all, that's sure. But there's one thing I can do. I've a ship-building yard; some of you work in it, and you've been waiting to hear the words, "Only working half-time," and a lad or two, or, may be, an old man, "not wanted." For trade's bad, and you know it as well as me.'"

Wilmot laughed to herself from the back bench, at the way in which the old man enjoyed the drama of his proclamation; yet beneath the self-advertisement how great was the love of kind dealing.

"Well, I'm not going to say it," he went on. "There won't be any half-time, please God, this coming winter.

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Least of all, will there be any old man turned away, for fear that when I get up yonder to the gates, Peter will say to me, 'Ugh! only an old man, after all. Old men weren't wanted in your timber-yard, and we've no need of old men in the city of God. Reckon, we'll not be able to keep the pavements in repair with too many of your kidney about.'

"And, mind you, he'd be about right; they'd not want me up there in the golden city, where, for all John's visions, it's my belief there'll be less gold and more monthly roses and 'boys' love' than ever he saw, and more need o' gardeners than jewellers up there.

"But don't you think St. Peter will make any mistakes about you, when he sizes you up for what you're worth. He'll not be kinder to you than to others, even if 'tis a fisherman that comes to the gate. For 'twill be, same as to others, 'Evil deeds?' and then you'll stammer something, and he'll shake his head, for you'll have forgotten the half. Just like Peter himself, too, that'll be.

"For, mind you, Peter lied, just like you. And yet 'twas no matter, for still Peter loved, and that's why they gave 'en the keys. And so have you, lied, and fought, and cheated, and stole, and carried cowardly tales. Oh, it's all true, of you and me and Peter. The question is—Have you loved?"

The speaker lunged half out of the pulpit.

"Oh, I don't mean have you looked sheepish over a maid, when the hot blood of your manhood was hissing through your members, but have ye borne the burdens and lightened the sorrows of that same maid when the grey hairs come and the back was bent—or of that other bent woman that bore you? Don't I hear often and often of maintenance orders, forced on young cowards, to keep the old folks? And what about the wives?"

"No, no, it wouldn't be manlike to push the pram and

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carr' the babe, when you'm in your best clothes. But come to think of it, you couldn't look sillier pushing a pram or carr'in' a cheeld, than you did when you courted. And that you've only to find out by looking at the next chap that's keeping company. But it's the grudging, petty sins that gnaw closest to the bone.

' To curse and swear,  
They do forbear,  
But lie and steal,  
They do prevail,'

as everybody says that knows the Methodies.

"Well, lying and stealing come uncommon easy to most of us, in this world where 'tis so damned hard to live. Yes, and cursing and swearing come uncommon easy to me, as ye may hear any day you're passing my yard. And, after all, I'm not so sure you won't be all the better for letting off a bit of steam here and there. Though, if there's any young chap that think's I'm a good excuse, I'll let 'em know how hard I've tried to rid myself of the plaguey words.

"But whether ye've lied, or stole, or cursed, or cheated, whatever your special whack may be, there's one thing most of 'ee have done, and I'm minded to tell 'ee in plain words what 'tis."

He drew a long breath.

"There came a stranger among you—to do his daily business of helping your children into the world safely, of helping to bring 'em up cleanly, of smoothing the way of pain for your sick and old folks. He's done all that—and more. In a bad hour for himself he put to himself the work of cleaning up this old place a bit—and it wanted it. You know well enough how there's always been low fevers down the courts and alleys, in hot spells or after there's been any overflowing of the sewers. You know the rheumatics from the damp and the sunlessness o' the rotten pigsties they call

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houses. He's fought that battle for 'ee over and over again, Have you ever asked yourself what he got for it?

"No. You haven't. Well, ask now. What *did* he get for it?

"Money? No, not a stiver more than he would have had if he'd droned along and smiled over the stinking holes some of you call homes.

"Good name?

"Good name; why you condemned 'en unheard, because he was a 'foreigner,' because he'd a sharp tongue, because he wasn't a saint, because he damned a thing or two in your midst—a child starved, a woman kicked, a man knocked about. He's made mistakes; and good Lord, what else could you expect in a man born of a woman and begot by a man same as the rest of us? Time and again, he's turned sour under your words and your deeds. But he's fought your battles all the same.

"No, I'll tell you what he's got for his pains. Just exactly what most of those do get, who try to do a little bit of good, more kicks than ha'pence, from the skulkers in the battle, like you and me. All down the centuries it's been the same—to this man, stones; to that man, the block; to t'other, the whipping-post. Is it a statesman that knocked the fetters off millions? Oh, pay him with a sneer; all for his own glory, of course. Is it a thinker? Oh, burn him, cage him, rack him. Is it a discoverer? Put 'en in chains.

"For in all the names that are written in letters of gold across the secret or the public history, of those who went into the welter of battle to gain a little help for their fellows, not one of them was without sin or weakness. Not one, not one in all the long list. And on that fact, all the world, just like Challacombe, has fastened and battened and drunk deep, filling their bellies with venom.

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"Now I've said my say, and I hope you'll be the better for it. You'll think evil, as you've been doing any time this last twelvemonth, again and again, that you will, before you wait outside that gate for Peter. But, all the same, try to love a little, suffer a little for others, ere you die.

"For both you and I stand between Life and Death, and that doesn't mean only between the womb and the worm, but between the sunny land of God's own peace and the inky blackness of the devil's pitch-fields."

Wilmot slipped out before the lights sprang up, not unobserved by Miss Penaluna, who, closely veiled, sat in the darkest corner of the room. The congregation spent the time during the wailing of the hymn in carefully avoiding each other's eyes.

Miss Penaluna, going slowly up the road from the chapel, heard hurried steps behind her; it was the captain.

"Touched 'em up a bit, didn't I?" he said, walking along by her side and mopping his heated face. "I've been burning to get that knife in for months. And I doubt but it will be a good while before they ask me to preach again."

He was elated with a sense of his own boldness, as Miss Penaluna felt. She was sorry to find him more human than heroic, for Miss Penaluna dearly loved a hero, like most of her sex. Then she voiced her fear.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Borlace didn't like it," she said timidly.

"Eh, what? Oh, that's all right. I dare say she may go about a bit, with her little nose in air, talking about dignity. As if Dr. Tony ever bothered his head about that—he's none of your figures of gravity, that do cream and mantle like a standing pool, not he. That's only her finicking feminine way, if she makes a fuss."

"I don't say Challacombe doesn't deserve it, Captain

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Penrice ; but won't it make the doctor's position even more difficult ? ”

“ Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. For Challacombe's just like a naughty child, all the better for a good beating. They'll come to heel.”

He accompanied her up the hill to her own door.

“ Do come in,” she said in a flurry ; “ you must be very hot and tired.”

The captain succumbed, and Wilmot found the two, a little while later, cheerfully sitting over a candle-lit supper-table.

As he rose to greet his niece, Miss Penaluna suspected the captain of a little trepidation.

“ That's right, my dear,” he said fussily, “ you've just come in time. You didn't wait for me after chapel. Hurried home to the child, I suppose.”

“ I didn't, I was too angry,” said Wilmot. “ How could you make Tony the laughing-stock of the place, Uncle Dickie, telling the people what a hero he is, when you know how weak he was with the Council ? ”

She stopped, remembering Miss Penaluna's presence. That lady, however, took the opportunity of slipping out of the room to get clean plates.

“ Oh,” said the captain, airily, “ you're thinking of the matter of the piping and that affair with the Council.” All the same he eyed her narrowly. “ You know I think the doctor was right to give in to the Council about the lead pipes. I told him so long ago, for, after all, typhoid and low fever are bigger things than a few cases of lead poisoning. I doubt but what you are blaming him wrongly, ladybird.”

“ I suppose Tony has been discussing me with you ? ”

“ A woman cannot, I suppose, be expected to see eye to eye with a man. But all the same you ought to be able to see that in any practical matter one step up is better than

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no step at all, and, however much a man may want to get to the top in one stride, the cussedness of this old show won't let 'em."

But Wilmot stuck to the personal. "Why should you try to excuse Tony, if he has not discussed me with you?" she asked.

"Excuse, indeed; I see no reason to make excuses for a man who has just tried to do his duty," he fumed, as a man will under a pin-point of logic.

"Then don't try to do it, Uncle Dickie, especially as you imply that I've no concern with public business."

Captain Penrice said a few things—lingeringly. Then he began again—

"Isn't it your husband's honour, rather than the town's welfare, that you are thinking of? You know, after all, it's nothing but that last that he had to think of."

"As I look at it, the two are one—Tony's honour and the town's welfare. Since you will discuss this matter, Uncle Dickie, let me ask you why the question of the kind of pipes was kept persistently in the background by Tony and his mouthpiece, Mr. Patient, so that the ratepayers themselves had no idea of the real point at issue?"

She was white and trembling, for she had scarcely dared to put the doubt plainly to herself.

"It was contained in the newspaper reports of the Council meetings."

"Slurred over; there was, I know, more heated discussion than was ever allowed to appear. And so scarcely any one—outside the Council—thought more of it than as a mere whim of Tony's, which he withdrew, with an apology, as a mistake."

"As a counsel of perfection. Say that and you say the truth."

"It was exactly that which he ought to have stood for,

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that counsel of perfection, that and nothing else. And he failed in his trust. Why? Just because he was content with apparent success. To get his own way, outwardly, he was willing to betray——”

“Wilmot, Wilmot, words once said echo in one's ears for ever. How dare you judge, condemn, when you cannot read all?”

She was silent, being awed at her own cruel coldness for the moment.

“It was you who made me say it, Uncle Dickie, just you and that dreadful sermon.”

“No,” she said to Miss Penaluna, who came hurrying in, “I can't stay, thank you. I'm too much upset, and Avis will be wanting me.”

The elderly culprits eyed one another guiltily as she disappeared. Turning at the garden gate, Wilmot watched the lights flicker over the two heads as they sat down again at the bright-looking table. In her dull anger she accused them of selfish absorption, called them elderly sybarites, whereas the spirits of both were chilled by a common sense of wrong-doing, for Miss Penaluna thought the sermon, bad taste and all, a masterpiece, and had not scrupled to say so.

Meanwhile, the doctor shouted with laughter that night, when Wilmot “warned” him of the public reproof that had been administered by the busybody uncle.

“It's all right,” he said, “it won't make a pin's point of difference to my position ; perhaps, though, it'll make some of 'em pay up their accounts with me. But I got this for you this morning as I passed the post-office, and it's clean slipped my mind till this minute.”

It those days there was no Sunday post at Challacombe, but letters could be obtained by visiting the office.

“Tony,” she said after a time, in a queer, strained voice, that caused him to lift his head from the paper in which he



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was immersed, "Tony, it's from Archelaus Rouncevell. He has been living in Canada all this time. And—his mother must have known all along."

"By Jove!" said Dr. Tony. "What a vicious old hag!"

"And," said Wilmot, in a strained voice, "I suffered so. I wasted all that suffering, that a little thing like this"—she struck the letter with her hand—"might so easily have ended. I'll never waste effort in penitence again."

It was unreasonable she knew; but—a woman hates waste. She walked up and down the room, while the doctor watched her curiously.

"Oh!" she cried at last, stopping short, "I'd forgotten Avis. And there's no shadow over her now—no shadow at all. She has a mother no worse than any other child's mother."

The doctor laughed, the logic seemed quaint to him, but as long as it comforted, it were mere pedantry to dispute it.

"Here," she said, holding out the letter, "read it. It's all about a wonderful being he's been painting—a Greuze head, he says. And I've been agonizing over——"

"A creature that's bound up with a Greuze head," finished Dr. Tony.

The boy had passed so far away from her, she felt suddenly grown old and past all the joys of life. For the letter was truly painfully Greuzish: the writer put the Greuze girl on a totally different plane from herself; the thought stung closer and closer.

"And," she said, "now I shan't be able to feel that Avis starts life handicapped every way. Do you know I positively was glad to hear it was a girl, for I wanted to feel that she would start up from the very lowest point—a girl, with a wicked mother. For, you know, Tony, she's to be splendid, a great woman. We must save and struggle to give her every chance, girl as she is. She must be educated, given chances, pushed."

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The doctor laughed as he finished the letter.

"Well, as for the handicapping, isn't her father game for any amount?" said he. "Why alter the programme because of this?"

"Why, now she isn't handicapped as much as I thought," she said whimsically. "I thought her mother had done so much mischief. And now, I must envy Johanna, for her baby couldn't start lower than she has."

"Please leave Johanna out of the question. I would, if I were you. A man doesn't care for his wife to say that kind of thing."

"Really, Tony," said Wilmot, sweeping superbly away, but flushing as she caught his eye, "that is the most commonplace thing I ever heard you say. Johanna is in every way a far better woman than I. For placed by training and circumstance where she was, I could never have found a way out."

"Possibly; but it doesn't alter the facts of what Johanna has been."

"I never thought you so cruel," she said. Inwardly, dislike herself for it as she might, the joy of the Pharisee possessed her. Whether by circumstance or character, what mattered it? She was not as Johanna or as many women.

Then queer thoughts flashed in her. To an intelligence of wider ken than the human, how appeared these other women outside, whom at bottom even kindly Tony differentiated from their sisters? This Johanna, for instance, how she had often hated to see her handle Avis, or that other woman of Captain Penrice's youth? "Pearl of great price" he had called the latter; but did the old captain ever think of her when he sat in the light opposite Miss Penaluna?

But next day she, too, had forgotten the thought, for had not Avis just lifted wonderful eyes to hers? For to mothers babes make all things new, even this planet full of misfits.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CHARTLESS SEAS

WILMOT stood gazing into the darkened consulting-room. It was a sunny morning, and the dancing chequers from the trees opposite the house dappled the floor of the hall through the open front door, but the window shutters of the room within had been closed, and only a few pale fingers of light pierced the gloom through the barred shutters. Suddenly as she stood at the half-open doors the shadows within caught at her throat with the fear they brought, as a thunderstorm coming up against the wind over a sun-swept moor brings darkness out of the unknown.

Dr. Borlace stood holding Avis in the hollow of his left arm, and the fat curves of her bare feet clung to the hairy strength of his hand. The downy head rested in the angle of his shoulder and breast, like a moorland sheep crouching in the hollows of a cart-track when the wind bites shrewdly. Semicircles of light, swift as scythe cuts, flashed before Wilmot, for the doctor had lit a candle and was passing the flame close to the child's wide-open eyes. In a second her mind travelled backward along the road that the race has trodden, back to the terrible origin of our fears. A dream of some nights ago started out before her like the gypsy *dukerippen*, or cloud portent, seen in the wonderful dream-light. She saw savage faces crowding on a wild promontory; their peaked goat-beards were swept against their breasts by a wild wind, and they all pointed furiously towards the sea whence the wind blew—a sea that seemed to boil above an unknown dread. Then she suddenly darted

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forward and snatched the child from her husband's arms, with the pang of an agony that stung her into sudden life.

"How dare you!" she cried. He seemed to her like a stranger peering into the intimate reticences of personal life as she covered with her hands the child's face and groping hands, sheltering both from the doctor's gaze, as one would shield some deformity from the cruel eyes of a crowd. In that second she hated him with the petty, pin-point hatred that is half-contempt. She remembered only the tiny mannerisms that jar in closest intimacy—how he gulped his food, how he shuffled his feet, how he scraped the spoon on his plate. Under his ragged moustache there seemed a curious leer, like that of a Silenus, on his pursed-out lips. "Oh, how dare you!" she whispered again over the child's snuggling head. "Oh, I know why you look at her like this; I know, only I wouldn't say I knew. Yesterday, she never noticed the sunbeams that Johanna's child danced after."

The doctor was silently throwing open the shutters and letting in the daylight—to himself and the room.

"I wondered," he said at last, "how much you had seen. But I thought you were out just now, or I shouldn't have examined the child. You oughtn't to have known yet."

"I was wrong," she said passionately, "when I said long ago that something comes out of the unknown and touches you, when you're to be punished. It doesn't do that, it touches something else, something you love."

"Don't take it over-hardly, child. Nowadays, there is plenty of life even for the blind."

"Ah, don't, Tony!" She winced as if the word hurt more than the thing. "Cannot she even see the light?"

"No," he said curtly.

"And it was only a few days ago that I regretted she wasn't handicapped enough. Avis, conceived and born in the shadows, not handicapped enough!"

The doctor moved miserably about the room, feeling thankful, however, that she could speak ; it was the silence he had feared most of all. But he knew she paid little heed to him. In the shock she was but thinking aloud.

"She was to have been perfect, for my atonement, for Archelaus Rouncevell, who never died."

She began to laugh, and the doctor's hand clenched on the silver egg-boiler he was examining curiously on the side-board. He remembered what a useless wedding present they had thought it, but for the life of him he could not now recall the name of the giver.

"Tony," she said, checking herself, "if Mrs. Rouncevell had put me out of my trouble by telling me that Archelaus was alive, would this have happened to my baby?"

"Wilmot, Wilmot, 'tis but another morbid fancy. Who could answer you that? I can't."

"Tony, aren't these eyes my work, due to my fears? I know, I know, how I saw his eyes over and over again."

"Even if you put it at that, it was not your conscious will that did it. 'Twas but a part of the strange working of laws that as yet we haven't an inkling of. Child, child, don't beat yourself up against the rocks like this."

The doctor wished that he had been more of a statistician ; it might conceivably have been a consolation to know what is the average number of children annually born blind. Wilmot's fatalism was so depressing that it would have been a relief to escape from the twilight of superstition into the daylight of fact. The atmosphere of a chemical laboratory, where one can measure substances accurately to the infinitesimal part of a centimetre, would have been comforting after this phantom-haunted place of fear.

"And that woman, that woman you took from the streets, she could bear a child that dances in the sunlight," she cried. "You must tell her, Tony, never to bring her child

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into the house. If she ever does it again, she must go right out of the house. I'll never have her child near my child again."

"Very well, Wilmot." The doctor's sensations were those of the swimmer in a chartless sea.

"But," went on the monotone, "after all, *she* was honest. She gave herself honestly, she cared for her child's father, after the fashion of her kind. Nature understands her kind of caring. She doesn't understand our way of love at all, Tony," she said, holding herself back, as he could feel, from a final loss of control, as she put Avis back in his arms and strolled to the window, for the child was beginning to whimper. "I always hated maimed things," she whispered, standing with her back to the room and speaking in the toneless voice that comes with great fatigue.

Dr. Borlace looked at his wife speculatively. He had feared to hear this thought from her ever since his first discovery. He was startled into plainer speech.

"But there will be other children, Wilmot, born, not maimed, in the sunlight."

"Not of you and me, Tony. Children ought to be born of true lovers, and that's part of her inheritance, too. My Heavens, couldn't you have, at least, left that alone? And do you think her mother would ever be glad to see others in the sunshine that she can never know?"

Then came the collapse from tension that the doctor had expected. An hour later, when Wilmot had sobbed herself into a half-sleep, Dr. Borlace sought out Johanna to warn her to keep quiet.

"For," said he, "it's deep waters, my good woman, that we're in. The child's mother will never take this trouble as a plain woman like you would do."

"And it's none so easy that I should take it neither," said Johanna, her sex-pride up in arms. "But it's easy come, easy go, with men. One child more or less to them,

what's the odds? If one child's wrong, a man always thinks t'other will make up. But to a woman nine healthy chillern don't make up for one weakly one."

"Then Nature, the old rip," growled the doctor, "isn't a woman at all, for a slip in the handling here and there is no matter to her. She always says, 'Better luck next time,' as cheerfully as you please. But you'll do your best to keep the thing quiet, won't you? Mind, no chatter to any one. For it cuts deep, this does."

"And after all his talk it's he who'll talk first, I'll warn. For if you raked out the place with a small-tooth comb, you'd never find a man that could keep a thing quiet worse than the doctor," said Johanna to herself, irreverently.

One of the most frequent of the many wonderful statements made about woman by man is that she is the inarticulate portion of the race. He usually proves his point by reference to the epic, the opera, and the creative arts in general, forgetting in his haste the greatest creative art of all, of which the others are but shadows, the great creative art of motherhood. To the woman the children of the race are her epics and operas, and all down the ages she has spoken her inmost instincts and ideas in a way which all men may understand, if they will. The power of a beautiful child reaches a point of expression that never can be reached by epic or opera, for its appeal is world-wide and not made only to the favoured few who are able to think and feel by those particular modes of expression, the word and the sound. For the difference between fatherhood and motherhood is the difference between vicarious and personal self-expression: to the mother a child is herself, enlarged, with greater capacities of power than she has ever possessed; to the father but one of the many forces of life which he may, indeed, direct, but for which he can never be entirely responsible. He feels the vivid thrill

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of the driver of a four-in-hand, but the mother feels herself horses and driver in one. All day the doctor guessed something of this as he watched, haunting the house and noiselessly observing Wilmot's movements. He noted that Johanna alone cared for the child, and that the mother never went near it. Then, when the lamps were lit, she shut herself in her own room for hours. At last, hearing her door open, he followed her upstairs to the little room over the door that had been given up to the child, and that opened on the one side into Wilmot's room and on the other into his. From behind the screen that partly covered the doorway of his room he watched. Thus Johanna found him when she came up to prepare the rooms for the night. With a quick gesture he motioned her to silence.

Wilmot had placed a lighted candle on the low mantelpiece, and, keeping her knees wide, she held baby Avis as in a hammock on her dress. Johanna noticed the yellow circles made against the looking-glass on the mantelpiece by the candle reflection. Wilmot seemed to Johanna, who could only see the candle-lit group in the surrounding darkness dimly, to be curling the tendrils of the child's hair round her fingers. Then the doctor made a movement, putting his hand suddenly to his mouth as he usually did when struck by a doubtful thought. Stealing behind him the woman saw that Wilmot's hand was over the child's mouth.

"Keep quiet, damn you," said the doctor, grasping Johanna's arm as she would have started forward with an exclamation.

The next moment she heard him give a long breath of relief, for the tiny red face at its mother's touch began to pucker into a thousand wrinkles and the lips to work, as the baby stretched out its limbs with a whimper. Suddenly the mother clutched the creature to her face in an agony of tenderness, raining down kisses and



tears. Quickly, noiselessly, Dr. Tony shut the door of communication.

"That's neither for you nor me," he said, with a shamefaced laugh. "We'd better quit just now, I reckon. That's all right, thank God. Nature, the silly old dummun, isn't such a fool as she looks. Lord, but it wasn't a picnic to watch!"

But Johanna had vanished.

Then Dr. Borlace sat down to reckon up the situation. Presently he heard the simmer of a spirit lamp from the next room, and smiled grimly to himself, for Wilmot was, as he knew, preparing from the implements left by Johanna the child's next meal.

"All serene," said he to himself. "Gad! but the little cuss has kept me on thorns this day."

Then his thoughts took a practical shape, for the future of this helpless child was to be considered. During the lifetime of her parents Avis would be shielded, but he must take care to leave enough to protect her partially helpless life after his own death. For, as Dr. Borlace knew well, the only protection against the world's sorry treatment is money; it was mainly poverty that drove the hunchback to the position of Court jester. It is a sorrowful fact, indeed, that although man has now made himself master of two-thirds of the human and animal destinies of this planet, he is still largely helpless to prevent needless suffering among the abnormal. To leave a child to struggle unaided with its lot is painful enough for a parent, so to leave a handicapped child ought to be unthinkable to him: it was so, at any rate, to Dr. Borlace. He determined to be an excellent business man for the future.

Unread by her husband, Wilmot was ere long facing the situation with a loftier courage than his, for the qualities of courage are as varied as those of light, and the dawn-light

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on the hills of the born idealist differs as widely as possible from the noonday glare of the practical man. Like molten iron beaten into shape by the hammers of life, Wilmot's thoughts began to take new forms. At first she sat down deliberately to poise, one after another, the weights on her child: a girl, handicap number one; a blind girl, handicap number two; of doubtfully strong parentage, number three. But she would never, in fancy, at least, withdraw her child from the race for the stakes of success. Like the coral insect building its wave-beaten reef, Wilmot would build her reef of help, would save pennies here, shillings there, scrimp and pare and struggle, for the training needed by a blind child would be more costly than that needed by the seeing. So courage, like light, served the same purpose in both husband and wife—to illuminate. She would learn the Braille system of reading; she would know all about the training of the blind.

Soon she began to find congratulation in the child's misfortune; in an age of noise the life of her child would be high poised above vain clatter, seeking the rewards of achievement in other places than among the brazen-throated sellers in the market-place. The glorious calm of the olden life should surround this child, till the mother felt inclined to offer a cock to Esculapius, who had so marvellously ensured her child's mental health by laying his finger on her bodily eyes. She remembered joyfully that page in "Eothen," where the traveller describes how he had, inspired by his mother, breathed once for all into his mental lungs an ampler air than the modern one. It was a joy to think that this child would be more dependent than others, both spiritually and mentally; blindness and isolation—and her mother—should make of Avis a nobler woman than the strong man for whom she had wrestled in vain with the nature forces.

Dr. Borlace could not account for her cheerfulness, for when Nature made them male and female, she created not one incomprehensible, but two incomprehensibles.

Below in the kitchen that evening, watching the grey ashes fall from the dwindling stove-fire, Johanna wondered at many things, amongst others at the force that keeps a man true through that familiarity and satiety which, according to Johanna's experience, were always fatal to a man's loyalty.

"And he read her, too, as clear as print, with the cheeld, and I read him, and it made no odds, her was but the dearer. Ay, he's not Jim, nor the likes of him."

It was a childish classification enough, but mental growth always starts with simple classification.

"Isn't there anything in the whole world that would change 'en to her, not one thing she could do?" she whispered to herself, flushing scarlet.

At last only a grate furred with ash remained, but still Johanna lingered till weariness deepened the lines in her face. At last she stretched herself across the table and slept with her head on her arms, wondering at the way the potter creates his vessels, some for honour and some for dishonour. However, even Johanna was not without comfort, since Elizabeth's waist measured quite twenty-one nches already.

Under the roof of Dashpers there were perhaps, on the whole, not two incomprehensibles, but three; as many, in fact, as there were men and women. For the compiler of Proverbs omitted a fifth case, the way of a woman with a man, when he wrote—

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not:

"The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE DAWN OF NOTHING

"DIDN'T know 'en from Adam, but there, the moonlight do slimmer and slammer things up so, there's no knowing one man from t'other in it."

"No, nor no woman from 'nuther, as Sammy Langmead said when Zack Beable found 'en kissing his wife."

"Ho, ho, ho!" chorussed the two men. The countryman's laugh is more expressive than the townsman's, for it has gradations suited to the character of the joke, and ranges from the broad Homeric "Ho, ho, ho!" by way of the asinine "Haw, haw, haw!" down to the "He, he, he!" of the Satyrs.

The voices of the two fishermen, as they rowed their boat into the next cove to look at their crab-pots, floated clearly across to the beach where Mrs. Quick and Wilmot were encamped.

The smoke from their fire of driftwood pencilled a blue-grey line against the dun brown of the weed-hung rocks; over the fire, suspended on cross-sticks, hung the blue "billy" full of water for their tea. The baby basked in the sunshine on a ledge of rock beneath the overhanging cliffs, and against the opalescent shimmer of the Channel mist the tawny sails flitted in and out of the harbour of Challacombe, from which, hidden though it was by a jutting promontory, they could hear from time to time the clanking hammers of the forge on the quay. It was eerily still in the narrow cove when the two women were silent, and only the soft hiss of a wave broke the silence. Opposite them an

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iron gateway closed the end of a flight of steps that led nowhere, save perhaps to the ruined house whose outline could just be traced on the grass.

"I wish you weren't going back to-night, mother," said Wilmot, laying a hand on Mrs. Quick's. "It's been a very short stay."

"Eh, my dear, I'm bound to get back to-night," said Mrs. Quick, twisting the little packet of papers she held.

"Mother, what sort were father's people? I know all about the Borlaces, of course, but I've been thinking about what sort of forbears baby comes from, and I can't remember much about the Quicks. Plenty of them, of course, down at Zennor, but were there never any of them that did anything people would remember?"

"Well, there's that apostle spoon, you know, with what they say were the arms of Cranmer. It's been in the family as far back as anybody can tell, but most like, after all, 'twas but stolen by a Quick."

Wilmot laughed. She remembered the glamour cast over the whole family by that spoon, supposed to prove that in some way the accommodating archbishop had belonged to the Quicks.

"It isn't much to go by, is it?" said she. "But didn't any one do anything beyond stealing spoons?"

"Well, there was your great-aunt, that took to preaching. Thousands went to hear her, they say, and she'd make 'em cry or laugh like babies, just as she pleased, and she trailing about in a long-tailed white silk all up dirty stairs and on to filthy platforms. Her father'd not let her go on the stage, and she got melancholy mad till she took up with religion. And *her* mother before her used to hunt the devil at the prayer-meetings."

"It doesn't sound much more promising than the spoon episode, mother. Never mind, Avis shall be her own ancestor."

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"You were the brightest little child yourself, for all your dark skin, and never did anything miss your little black eyes!"

"Ah, mother, don't! Avis won't be able to emulate that," winced Wilmot.

"I often look at the funny letters you wrote me when I was away. Venny and Benny never said such things. I've got them here, for I thought you'd like, now you've a child of your own, to see what you were like."

Wilmot turned bright eyes on her mother. "Eh, dear," she said, borrowing her mother's phrase, "how well you understand things! Read me one now."

She sat facing the glory of the western sky with abstracted gaze, scarcely noticing the purity of its colour. Soon its brilliance brought to her eyes that sensation of weariness that sensitive people often feel at the contrast between actual life and the glory of sea and sky, the emblems of infinitude which our fathers spoke of as the celestial radiance of the heaven-dwellers. Mrs. Quick read—

**"MY DEAREST MOTHER,—**

"I was so delighted with my present that I don't know how to thank you enough, it was so pretty and so unexpected, for I did not expect any present, you being ill, but I knew that you would give me something afterwards, it was so beautiful a present. Eliza said she was glad to see your writing again, and she scratched her head when she said it. Aunt Lizzie must needs give me a shilling, which I did not want, and if it is fine to-morrow I am going in to spend it. She was very busy, and darned an emense stocking of Uncle Solomon's before Mr. and Mrs. Hodder. We had lamb's-tail pie for dinner and port wine after in honour of my birthday, and Aunt Lizzie concocted a beverage with warm water, sugar, and cider for William John and I.

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Thomas Oldrieve was there with nearly twenty dogs, setters, pointers, spaniels, and retrievers; when he saw me he was in raptures, wanted me to come out and see his old dogs, which I did not do, but condescended to stand on the window-cill outside when papa opened it, who was in as great haste as himself.

“List of the presents—

“William John. Thought to be the tusk of a badger, more like the horn of a ram.

“Eliza Pudner. Card, pretty.

“The shilling.

“Mother. Bangle, lovely, which I am wearing now and much delighted with.

“William John talked about the women-kind. Uncle Sol thought the lamb's-tail pie was pigeon-pie, although he was eating it. Mother, I want to kiss you so much.

“Your lovingest daughter,

“WILMOT.”

“Yes,” said Wilmot, “I'm pretty much like that now; I like to be the centre of things still, and to be looked at even if it's only by old Oldrieve. I can see him still in his brown velveteen coat with the pockets that used to be weighed down with puppies. Avis will never see a puppy.”

They were both silent, because over some things even women keep silence.

“But,” went on Wilmot, “I'm really sometimes glad she's as she is.”

Mrs. Quick was quick enough to note how her daughter hated the word “blind.”

“Yes?” said she.

“Because she'll be more dependent on me than other children are. All she'll know of the world will be through me. She shall only know the beauty of it. Think of it,

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mother, never to know any ugliness. That's worth thinking of, isn't it? You know I used often to wonder why young married women seemed so unhappy, and why they cheered up so when they had children. I know now, for with the children a woman knows she's wanted for noble uses. That's the best thing in life—to know you're wanted for splendid service. Children teach that; you never learn that of a man." She smiled bitterly.

"But the doctor," faltered Mrs. Quick.

"Oh, as for Tony, one woman's as good as another to him. There isn't much 'splendid service' about that sort of work. The likes of Johanna are good enough for that." She flushed darkly.

"Do you know, I never could understand how you can put up with that woman in the house."

"What, Johanna? Oh, she's a capital servant. We should be all to pieces without her, but I never have her child in the house. Do you know, I hate it. It's perfect all through, and I'm wicked enough to be pleased that Johanna's often worried about it, for it isn't brought up as wisely as she would bring it up, isn't 'bedded,' as she calls it, at half-past five, and fed exclusively on milk and oatmeal. Of course, if I were a good woman, I'd let her bring it up in the house with mine. But, thank Heaven, I'm not a good woman."

"Have her child brought up with yours," gasped Mrs. Quick. "Surely you must be going mad."

"Oh no, I'm not. It would only be putting the finishing touch to Tony's good work—the saving of that woman and child. But you needn't worry, I shan't do it."

"I should think not. Quite enough has been done for her, and more than enough, by rights."

"Oh, I don't know. After all, she's paid us back by the way she works for us. Yet it's the best thing Tony's ever



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done—she adores him, you know. He's a sort of god to her, and she turns crimson and then white when he speaks to her."

"My dear, you shock me."

"Oh, bless you, Tony doesn't know. He's simply not mortal at all. She's just a good servant that he's cured from evil by his own right hand, just as I'm a proper-looking wife outside. Tony's content enough. You know I thought it would be a good joke to make him feel something after I'd married. But I don't care about that, now there's baby to think of. She's cured me. And it's turning Tony into a model doctor, having to think of the child's future. Why, who do you think gets him up in the morning to attend to his business?"

Mrs. Quick felt her head whirl, being of the variety that does not analyze a situation.

"Why, Avis," said Wilmot in triumph. "He wants a good practice for her sake, and you can't have that without punctuality. Oh, without Avis we should both of us simply go to pieces. He's got as far as being called in for the housekeeper, too, up at the 'great house.' He never got higher than the footman before, until he had to think of the child and attend to his work."

She had never mentioned to any one that darkest memory, how she had laid her hand on the maimed child's face, remembering Tryphena's story of the deformed girl's deed; indeed, she never learnt that any living soul but herself had suspected that temptation.

"Well," said Mrs. Quick, decisively, "all I can say is, that I never shall understand the young woman of to-day. Your tone is positively distressing, Wilmot, and you put into words things that a properly made woman wouldn't even see. Your poor father always used to say that women were queer cattle to tackle, as if the apple they chewed

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went down, poor souls, worse with them than it did with Adam. But what he would say, if 'twas given him to know, about a bold young woman like you, 't isn't in me to say."

"My dear mums, Uncle Dickie never cradled me on sentiment. Now, if I'd been brought up on 'Stepping Heavenward' and 'Amy Herbert,' just think how I should have wallowed in tears and pined away in a 'decline.' Instead of that we go a-gipsying, Avis and I," she said, bending her face down to the child; "but," she said suddenly, "I wanted to kill her for a moment till she, oh, my God, stretched her little limbs against me and wanted to be fed! And—I couldn't."

There was a long silence, for Mrs. Quick was trying to peer with her stupid, but loving eyes into her child's mind, while Wilmot thought of the woman's stronghold, her children's need of her, which is as the shadow of a great rock. At last she, too, had a noble work to do, a work that has its birth in the past and that looks with foreseeing eyes into the ages. By the light of this knowledge she was linked with the centuries, raised from suffering into a power and responsibility far above outward show and meretricious adornments.

But the comfort of the rock shadow fails in the blaze of high noon.

One mediæval instinct, that of the grotesque, which has deserted the waking life of moderns, yet haunts the borderland of dreams which lies between our active powers and our potential ones. From the depths of sleep in the darkest hours of night a week hence, Wilmot, passing through this circle of monstrous fancies to full consciousness, lay at first wondering what noise could have aroused her, for she knew that the stimulus must have come from without. The sound was repeated instantly, and she knew, with a thrill of certain

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foreknowledge, the meaning of the anxious barking sound that came from the child's cot. The hours that followed were not consciously lived through, but known inwardly as if seen under the spell of some great artist. It was the work of seconds, that seemed like eternity, to call Johanna. There was no other help at hand in the house, for Dr. Borlace was away for the night.

"I know what to do," said Johanna, instantly alert, "Elizabeth's had it, too."

The words were comforting in a far-off sense, but mercifully no consciousness came to Wilmot, other than that of a spectator at a vivid drama of pictured pain.

The women flew to their tasks of heating water and preparing a bath, and all was done that Wilmot's love and Johanna's knowledge could suggest, but the child's powers of resistance were fearfully slight to Johanna's experienced eye. Seeing this child struggle so feebly against the grip of disease, she measured in a moment, as the mother mercifully could not do, the vital powers of her own baby. As soon as she could be spared she flew across the road to Captain Penrice, for William to be sent to summon Dr. Earwaker. By the time the doctor arrived Captain Penrice was sitting on the stairs in the hall, waiting for the time when he could be of service, while William occupied the kitchen and kept up the fire there.

But Wilmot knew well enough now what the end was to be, as with her strands of plaited hair falling on either side of a cold immovable face she bent over the child, feeling only the clutch of tiny fingers that asked mutely for help in vain: two strong women, three strong men, science, love—all obliged to look on helplessly at the weakness that begged for relief.

At last it came, and Wilmot heard the doctor mutter to himself, "No resisting power." She felt for a second as

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if he had unjustly, forgetting his own powerlessness, flung a reproach at the dead. Then she put them all out of the room.

"You'll wait and see Borlace," said Dr. Earwaker to Captain Penrice, "so I can be off. Best leave the mother alone, I should say. She'll take it hard, and the harder that it was a weaking, but those strange little women have a nervous strength of their own."

"I suppose," said the captain, sadly, "I'd best not try and see her for a bit."

"No, no, leave her alone, with the woman. That's ground old fogies like you and me must keep off." And the front door closed behind him.

"She gone, William, the little maid's gone," said the captain to his henchman, who, with questioning face and wildly upstanding locks, had come out into the hall.

"Then I'd best get on with breakfast, for the little missus will be wanting Mrs. Buckingham, and I can't abide being still a minute longer."

Johanna was thankful to find help waiting below when she came downstairs, for she was honestly frightened, not by the child's death, but by the mother's strangeness, and the two men, queer assistants as they might be, brought some sense of comfort.

"She'll maybe drink a cup of this," said the captain, as William appeared with a breakfast tray.

"Eh," said Johanna, with a choke, "you're dear good souls, both of 'ee."

"She's taking it hard?" asked William, for the captain was not so easy of speech.

"She isn't human. She's done everything herself for the l'ile thing, and she's took her away in her arms now. And never a tear, or so much as a shiver. I daren't go near her again."

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"Why?" said Captain Penrice at last.

"She hates me, for my cheeld's mine still. I should do the same too, if things was t'other way about. Do you go up to her, there's a dear man," she said, pushing the tray towards him.

Captain Penrice was a man who had lived, as an old man must, through many scenes in the human story, and he was not surprised at Wilmot's ways. After all, he reflected, Johanna was too healthy but for simple sorrow, plain hate, or hearty repentance, and would, therefore, have only the faintest inkling of the subtler woman's thoughts, though where the savage instinct of motherhood was in question, her intuition was unerring.

The baby face in its Dutch cap was very restful as it lay beside Wilmot, who held her left arm over the body above the eider-down quilt in which she had wrapped it, as if warmth mattered now.

"Poor little flower!" he said, softly touching one of the locks that fringed the cap. "It was better so, my dear. She'd maybe have been lonely after you and Tony and I'd all gone. You see, there wouldn't have been so much chance for her of getting love as there'd be with others. You must think like that. She'd have been lonely maybe. You'll drink this. Just to please me."

Wilmot obeyed. The warmth comforted her cold trembling for a time, as the old man piled more rugs on her.

"It's a sad homecoming for Tony," he said, trying to speak naturally of what he knew was the crucial point in the situation.

"He could be there when Johanna's child wanted him, not for mine," said Wilmot, coldly.

"But it was not his fault that he was away. My dear, my dear, try to be just, even now."

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"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said wearily; "it wouldn't have made any difference. Nothing would. Avis had to go." She was again holding the little frame tightly. "I'll not see him," she said, starting up; "you must stay here, and keep him away. I can't see him, till I've got more used to myself, without her."

The cold strength was breaking up, he hoped, for her lips were shaking now.

Then she broke the silence suddenly. "Uncle Dickie, do you remember what we talked about that day at Bossiney on the cliffs? You know I said you had done a dreadful thing in making me believe I could atone for my cruelty to Archelaus. It didn't do him any harm after all, but I've had to pay for it all the same."

"Eh, my child, isn't a little soul enough to atone?"

"Avis's little body is all I know, maimed, and soon to be dust as it was before I called it into being. It's just the dusty facts that I see. You can't atone. How can there be sense enough in a blind law even to understand atonement?"

"But there's this in it, that when the rending pang of loss comes, 'tis then that we poor folks here understand what love is. Birth-pains, the birth-pains of the best in us, my dear, that's what loss is."

The captain slipped away in his stockinged feet to wait for Dr. Borlace's return. Later in the day he heard him enter the house.

"You needn't tell me," said Dr. Borlace, briefly; "I've heard. But how is Wilmot?"

"You'd best not see her yet."

"So that's how she takes it, is it? It's the break up, then, captain. It was only the child that kept us together, you know."

The doctor sat down; he was splashed with mud from riding, and his unrazored face looked grim.

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"What does Johanna say?" asked he at length.

The captain shook his head dolefully.

"Then if Johanna gives up, there isn't any hope," he said.

"Pull yourself together, man. You'll only bring your doom on yourself, if you go on like this."

Just at that moment they heard Wilmot's voice in the hall. The captain started up and went to the door.

"Stay where you are," he whispered to the doctor; "she doesn't know you are back yet."

Though they had all forgotten the fact, it was Sunday evening, and the last clanging of the church bells was going forth its defiant summons. As the captain opened the door, he saw Wilmot standing on the stairs to speak to Johanna. He saw with surprise that she was more handsomely dressed than usual, in black silk, with a black hat and veil. She was drawing on her gloves, and spoke calmly, almost haughtily, in tones quite unlike her usual familiar ones, for Johanna had apparently been expostulating with her for going out.

"Yes," she said, "I'm going out. Oh"—she laughed at the captain's face of protest—"you needn't be alarmed. I shall scarcely be noticed in this veil."

The house breathed more freely after she was gone, for there was a tense fighting spirit about her that cowed even a woman. Johanna, true to her sex as always, would have nothing said, even in wonder, by others.

"Now, then," she said, bustling round to hide her real apprehension, "you're both of 'ee looking so's a decent scarecrow wouldn't be seen speaking to 'ee. I'll have a meal on the table in a jiffy if you'll just get ready for it."

With this, she hustled them away. The captain sought William in the rear premises and the doctor went upstairs. As Johanna heard him open the door where the child lay,

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the room all painted in quaint Dutch figures, in the gayest colours, by Dr. Tony's own hand, she stood listening at the foot of the stairs, with a thumping heart.

"Eh, my dear soul," she thought, "and he so fond of chillern, and never a chance of any more for'n, and he knows it. I seed his face, the dear, as he passed, and her so rich, if her only knowed it. Oh, the little fool, the little fool, that she is! And I'd been to see if my cheeld was all right this afternoon, and she knew where I'd been and why. For she felt I'd have a sudden fear that Elizabeth mightn't be all right, with her cheeld dead."

Walking aimlessly out in search of bodily weariness, Wilmot went down the hill, past the Three Elms Inn, to the narrow street that leads to the harbour. The jostling crowds of trawlers and their women filled the streets. The stony, weather-beaten houses, how she hated them all! Truly it was Chalakim, a place of stone, squalid and bare; it had brought but defeat and the sorrow that she was beating back from her heart. The rush of a sudden squall of rain drove her up a narrow alley, steep like the side of a wall. From a flickering lamp that projected over the door there was the simple announcement, "Church." The scuds of rain and the wind that blew down the road, as if through a tunnel, made her push open the swing door and enter.

It was the Church of St. Peter the Fisherman. There met her a rush of hot air, scented with the smell of humanity and the savour of flowers that, yellow and sickly, were slowly dying on the rough wooden walls and still rougher wooden pillars. She sank into a seat in the centre aisle, and knelt mechanically with the shabby women. The ugly, pathetic place, with its crosses made of cockleshells and a series of pictures on the walls of the agony of the world-tragedy, such as are more often seen in foreign churches; the bright lights of the altar; the dimness where the poor



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folk knelt ;—all these caught at her heart, for the pain of the world spoke from the walls, and the toil which supplements the pain was evident enough on the men and women, as they crowded together in their separate aisles. And the glorification of pain and struggle shone in the great lights over the altar. Through the open windows, over the men's heads, there came the buffeting of the wind and the wash of waters, till the place seemed like a fortress against the forces of dread, for the sense of human kinship, found at moments in a crowd of fellow-creatures, was moving electrically over her mind. It is, indeed, the craving to satisfy this ache for fellowship that drives men to churches or even political crusades, for it is not thought that links, but the spirit of fellowship, that reached its highest point in ancient Greece, when friend died by the side of friend and knew not fear.

Nor did Wilmot know thought for a time in the blessed anodyne of fellowship, as she paid no heed to the service, but continued kneeling in her corner. There were no curious eyes to observe her, for all were children here, and often a fisherman would kneel with hands crossed, like a child's, while others stood.

But at last the very warmth of emotion awoke thought, like the pangs that herald birth. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee:" it was a huge scrawl over the men's heads that attracted her. Under the gusts of wind she could hear the waves beating against the quay. Then she knew that, passing through the waters of the spirit, there was only loneliness for her. Human help could do nothing, and to the spiritual help she cried in vain. The Divine "I" had left her alone in these waters, for there was no sense of help anywhere.

The processional hymn began ; the huge figures, rolling up the aisles with the step learned on the decks of heaving

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boats, carried the symbols of the cross past her. The male power of their deep voices shook her, but with all this human passion and all that Divine passion of which the symbols spoke, there was no help, not even to save a child or bring any comfort to its mother's loss. So much strength, so much fervour, and but the dusty answers that the soul gets when "hot for certainty in this our life."

The great voices that were used to hail one another over the sea, sang—

"The Son of God goes forth to war,  
Who follows in His train?"

till the world seemed to shake with the echoes of the battle that tramples on the weak.

Three days later, after the child was away from her sight, she slipped up the hill to the newly opened station, taking with her a purse with a few sovereigns—at least enough to take her away. She had left a note for Johanna :—

"I have gone to stay with an old servant, whom Dr. Borlace knows. Tell him I shall be with Tryphena White for a few weeks. You can send a box, which you will find packed, after me to the address I enclose. I will write further in a few days, please tell your master. But I must be left alone for a short time."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD

A FORTNIGHT later Wilmot drew aside the curtains of her room at Uppacott. The long rays of virginal splendour that herald the dawn lay across the hills; the sheen of myriad dewdrops caught the light that, golden from the sun-heart, swathed the thatched outhouses in a covering of heaven's own splendour. The light glinted on the breasts of flocks of birds that wheeled and circled higher and higher towards the light. She saw the whole picture framed in a setting of wide-blown monthly roses clinging close to the deep-set window. Thousands, millions of years, since the dawn-light first caught the dew, yet still the earth leaps to the sun-blessing as though for the first time, for in this old earth there is no age, but eternal youth and the Edenic thrill for ages and ages. Hence the strange sadness of the dawn to human eyes, for with "yesterday's seven thousand years" behind it and untold ages before, it is the supreme spectacle of earth's glory, and serves but to illuminate the quick passing of the human may-fly. For in the contrast between the shadow that is individual life and the age-long existence of the outer world, lies that torment of eternity that weak souls seek to avoid by crowding close to one another, herding in cities to escape the silence of the stars.

Uppacott, left to Tryphena White by the elderly relative whom she had nursed after leaving Mrs. Rouncevell, was a small steading of thirty acres, with "venville" rights on the moorland. The house and yard, hidden in trees, crouched at the foot of Mel Tor, a jagged, granite-topped

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point on the southern slope of Dartmoor. A square porch of whitewashed granite divided the two wings of the house, the living-rooms and the wood-shed and cow-byre, both covered by the same ancient thatch, green with patches of house-leek and gold with points of moss. Over the porch were the letters "I. T." and the date 1707, the former supposed to be the initials of Isaac Turner, the mason who built the house—unwisely, it would seem, since after much rain, a hidden spring welled up under the stone floor of the dairy and living-room, and consequently the walls stood anything but four square, but nestled into the folds of the ground. Giant fuchsias filled the garden at the back of the thatched pump-house to the side of the porch, and darkened the lower windows to a twilight shade even at high noon.

The "little fly-by-night," as Tryphena called Wilmot, had taken refuge here, rather than with her mother, because she knew Mrs. Quick would be sure to advise a speedy return to Challacombe and all that Challacombe meant. Here Wilmot felt herself able to stand aloof, amongst strangers, to look at her own future from a higher point of view. She had, of course, told Tryphena in outline the story of her trouble, at the same time demanding that no one else in the neighbourhood should be told anything save that "Miss Wilmot Borlace" was staying at Uppacott for rest and change. Tryphena consented to this after much expostulation, for, indeed, the little fly-by-night had a wicked charm for the old woman, something like that exercised on a sober theatre-goer of the old style by a music-hall piece; she suspected *diablerie* in the simplest action, being so used to the "regular" drama, but the *diablerie* itself was alluring.

Pulling the curtain hastily across the window, Wilmot threw herself once more on her bed. Sleep came at once, and there she lay all through the morning, still asleep, with the bustle of the farm going on beneath her window until

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the afternoon shadows were thrown across the yard. At last Tryphena could bear this laziness no longer, and noisily banged into the room with a tray of food.

"Well, I reckon you're a seven-sound sleeper," said she, setting the tray on the coverlet. "I've been up again and again, and you didn't so much as turn."

In a half-dazed state Wilmot sat up and drank the tea that Tryphena had poured out, then she set her teeth in the thick slice of home-made bread covered with the yellow "ream" of clotted cream. With a quick dart of pleasure she eyed the honeycomb, the yellow pat of butter, smelling of the peat fire; it was good to eat cream and honey and to feel her limbs sink deep in Tryphena's best feather-bed.

But Wilmot's tranquillity was not long lived, for, being left alone with some dahlias that Tryphena had laid on the tray as a peace-offering, suddenly she perceived a black object advancing with speed over the coverlet towards her; it was an earwig, and terrible in the rapidity of its movement, which is at root the cause of women's fear of such small deer. Crouching panic-stricken, Wilmot watched it climb the mountains and ravines of her blankets, but at last she clutched a handkerchief, imprisoned the creature, and with trembling hands shook it out of the window. With laughter at her own folly, she flung the ice-cold well-water over herself, and presently stood in the porch, there to be huddled by Tryphena into a coarse huckaback apron.

The five cows, followed by the young black bull, were filing slowly into the yard. The bull was the pride and terror of Tryphena's heart, for, bought young, ere his fierceness came upon him, she hoped to make a good price for him next year. In the interval she appeased his latent ferocity by keeping him in the meadows with his ladies, Scotch fashion. For Tryphena was all for nature; no calf foods for her; her calves were hand-fed on good milk. She was, of course, the

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mock of the parish for her new-fangled, or old-fangled, ways, but her balance sheet was none the worse for a little nature.

Tryphena herself was now "meating" three calves, letting them suck the milk from the truss of hay she held out to them, while a group of moor ponies rested their heads on the gate that opened on the moor, watching their more fortunate relations who shared the plenty of the farmyard.

Wilmot applied herself to the "easy" cow that stood waiting for her experiments, and gazing with the slow bovine fixity that is almost devoid of a gleam of speculation. The froggy udder sent a thrill of pleasure through Wilmot.

"Rare big fingers," said Tryphena's ancient hind, Heber, watching the performance of the new-comer, half-doubled up with mirth at the "fiddling ways" of her. At last he could stand it no longer, as Crumpie flicked a tail sonorously against the milk-pail.

"Here, let me catch hold," said he; "you are but tickling her."

The musical tinkle of the milk against the pail followed the movement of his long freckled hands.

"Heber," said Wilmot, snatching one of Tryphena's sun-bonnets from the gate-post and walking by the old man's side as he drove the cows up the lane, under the shadows of the beeches, "Heber, have you ever been married?"

"Married," said he, shifting his stick to his left hand and so leaving his right free wherewith to scratch his head. "No, I dunno that I have. Nort to marry here, for there is but furze bushes, though they grow uncommon."

"Mind you come back in time," shouted Tryphena, raising her head from the calves' bucket; "there's hog's pudding for supper, and I can't have 'em spoilt."

"Right," called Heber, "us'll mind. Missus's puddens, done to a turn of the gridiron, be worth minding too," said he, smacking his lips carnivorously.

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"Yes," said Wilmot, persisting; "but you must have thought about marrying some time."

"Thought on it, saith a; well, so I have, in a manner of speaking," said he, confessing the soft impeachment. "Reckon I took warning by my brother Aaron. Married a widow woman, he did, and never held up his head again, he didn't. There was but the two of us, Aaron and me, and love-chillern at that, if you'll excuse me mentioning it."

Heber, a love child, laughed Wilmot to herself, as she glanced at his long bony form, his red freckled face and hands.

"Mother never had a bit o' luck, for there never was a man that could abide her long enough to come to the ring, so us was brought up mostly on workhouse skilly and tetties, 'but,' says mother, 'I'll give 'em Bible names, for if there's any good going I'm sure I'm the one that wants it."

"And Aaron married a widow?"

"A did, and half a yard of pump water at that. I turned it over in mind, and it fair bothered me what a did, in the courting, when it come to clipsing, for where a found her waist, I couldn't tell, for 'twas all the same, up and downs, and no more shape, nor not so much, as in that gate-post."

Heber struck it a sounding thwack.

"It wouldn't matter, would it?"

"Well, it simmed awkward, so I just asked 'en. 'Man,' says I, 'where did 'ee put your arm when it come to a tender moment?' 'Oh,' says he, 'I just took it as it come.' And there," said Heber, solemnly, "is where us differed. I never could ha' took it as it come, neither woman nor waist."

And, indeed, the finest working method here below is to take it as it comes: it was just here that Wilmot, too, knew herself to be a failure.

"And were they happy?"

"Well, I reckon Aaron found that life wasn't all potato parings, as the pig said when the butcher'd got the knife in

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the throat of 'en, and this was what fair warned me off 'Wilt thou have this woman?' After five or six months o' wedlock, her called to 'en and said, 'Aaron, I want to say something to 'ee.' Now, miss, if you'll excuse me mentioning it to an unmarried lady, though I never can believe it of 'ee, you're that ripe and languishing."

"Heber, you're a sad dog."

"Iss; I have it in me, and it would have come out in me if I hadn't had the poor luck to be born where there's nort but furze."

"But what of Aaron?"

"Well, you see, what he had in his mind was that they'd been wedded just about the time that a man expects his wife to say something to him and feels he'd like a little corduroys to step alongside of 'en."

Wilmot suddenly shivered.

"But, 'Aaron,' says she, solemn-like, 'I've friends coming to stay here for a bit, and I don't see that there's room in the house for you to bide here no longer. Least-ways, not till they'm gone, and that won't be for six months or so. The long and short of it is that I want 'ee to go for a bit.' 'Go, my dear,' says he, 'I'll go fast enough. Don't you put yourself out about that.' And so he did, got a new place, and left her to her friends."

"And never came back?"

"Ay, but that's just what a did do. Come back a crawling to her, a poor-spirited toad. If he'd had my sperrit he never would ha' done it."

"And was there a little corduroys?"

"Not it, for what could 'ee expect of a yard o' pump-water? Why, her bought a roll of horse-cloth flannel and made it into shirts for Aaron, and he never had a shirt to his back but what 'twas made o' that stuff, for it lasted and lasted and her'd got a roll of it. Why, many a time he said to me, 'Heber, if it wasn't that granite cattle-scratchers be



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common here about, I should ha' died afore now of the rasping of this here darned stuff upon my back.' And that's marrying, that is ; not for me, thank 'ee kindly," said Heber, firmly, "though a bit o' dangling here and there's nort to make 'ee or break 'ee. Get up," he concluded, shouting to the dog as he had done every night for a quarter of a century, as the beast caught the tail of the last cow and was dragged behind it into the field.

"I'm going on a step or two farther," said Wilmot, pointing to the granite clitter that covered the slopes of Mel Tor.

"Don't 'ee forget the puddens, then. Overdone, they'r'n naughty but common victual ; just off the fire and crackling, they melt in the mouth, they fairly melt."

At the summit of the tor she turned her back on the group of fields and clumps of trees that marked the boundaries of Uppacott and faced the moor. To the left the Dart gleamed like a silver bow in the dark gorge of tree-clad tors that hemmed it in. The stream was sunk to a trickle among the boulders, for no rain had fallen for weeks, yet the murmur of it rose clearly to this great height far above. To the right spread the waste, interlaced here and there by a ribbon of road, winding between the lines of tors, that rose shoulder behind shoulder till lost in the evening greyness. Over the hills she watched the shadows gather, the shadows that mean peace. From childish pleasure at the upspringing of health in herself that had been heralded by her long sleep, Wilmot passed to a passionate appeal. It is always the same appeal in such joy-loving souls—the cry for more life and fuller, from the passionate artist child, battering a wooden doll because the world has denied a pleasure, to a Cleopatra that passes from one love to another. In Wilmot it was the keener for the repression she had suffered in the struggling life at Challacombe : she had known the depths, let her know the heights. *Ut vita sic umbra.* Over the

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face of the moor the shadows gathered, till the torsi faded in darkness, and it seemed that the ages rolled on, taking with them the shadowy forms of the long dead, till the last little shadow that passed was the child Avis, the last of a long procession. The "fearful thing,"

"To die and go we know not where ;  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot—"

this horror of the life-lusting Elizabethans, that had haunted her too, was passing from her, thank God, and Avis would be translated into the purple of the rose and the gleam of daffodil yellow, a part of the beauty and mystery of the world.

As far north as the yard-gate of Uppacott, by the beech-trees, she was met by the joys of the gridiron, for Heber was on the look-out in the porch, and the two dogs, Young Help and Old Help, barked a welcome from their bed of sacks on the stone floor of the passage.

"I was afraid you'd be late," said the old man, bustling her into the house. "There's black ones too."

That evening Wilmot at last took into her hands the task of organizing her life for the next few months. She wrote to her uncle and her husband, explaining that for the present she must be left alone.

It is only at a certain distance from our perplexities that we can find the clue to their solution. Let her, she wrote, stay away long enough to view them dispassionately, as a spectator would view another's life. The trouble of ways and means need not be any bar, since Captain Penrice's wedding gift to her brought in enough for her to pay Tryphena the ten shillings a week, which would amply satisfy her. Dr. Borlace acquiesced, as she had known he would, and Captain Penrice even wrote approving of the wisdom of such a temporary separation.

It was Tryphena who doubted the wisdom of the proceeding, for little fly-by-night was to her what smoke is to a

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skipper who suspects fire in the hold. She doubted the more as health and strength returned to her lodger, especially after a certain episode, of which she was an indignant spectator.

The walls at Uppacott were three feet deep, and the windows yawned like chasms opening on the dusk of night. As Wilmot stood one evening before the blurred mirror that refused to reflect much, being patched with blotches of damp, she was watched by Tryphena from the doorway behind at the top of the steep staircase of nine steps. There were but two bedrooms upstairs, and these only divided by partitions of painted wood. Fortunately, Heber, whose snores could be heard in the yard of a still night, had a room opposite, over the hay tallat.

As Tryphena watched, she saw her lodger turn down the neck of her nightdress in a square.

"That looks bad," said the watcher to herself, eyeing Wilmot's proceeding with a full-hearted absorption that left no room for shame at playing the spy. "I know what baring your buzzum means with a little light o' love like that. Thank God, my chest is as flat as an ironing-board."

Suddenly her interest changed to alarm as she saw Wilmot fly to the chimney-piece and seize two ornamental candlesticks fitted with blue-and-pink wax candles.

"Oh, the little hussy!" said Tryphena, "I'm gallied if she isn't going to light 'em, and I haven't so much as put a match near 'em since Cousin Selina brought 'em over. And to light my best candles for her pringle-prangling."

She was in the room in a whirlwind of petticoats, and had wrenched the treasure away before Wilmot knew what was happening.

"No, you don't, my lady," she said. "Lay snares you may, but you'll not do it by the light of my best candles. A farthing rushlight ought to be enough to light a decent woman to her bed."

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Tryphena was not at all sure that strict propriety did not demand that the holy should go darkling between the cold sheets.

"How dare you come into my room like this?" flashed Wilmot, as, with one bare foot covering the other and scarlet signals flying, she faced her angry hostess.

"My candles that I'd been treasuring," gasped Tryphena.

"I shall go to-morrow. I won't be treated in this way. You've no right to come in here like this," retorted Wilmot.

"You can go first thing if you like, for we're not up to the level of bare shoulders here, save of a morning with flannel and soap," screamed Tryphena.

She banged the door behind her, and Wilmot sat down, her nerves shaken by the onslaught. To her horrified fancy the youth that had welled up in her seemed now no better than a crime, for only a child's hand had the right to nestle among the laces at her breast.

In the grey dawn at five o'clock she was roused by what seemed the noise of an angry mob. As she awoke more fully, she recognized it as the crying of a flock of sheep, frenzied at the loss of their lambs, and penned in the home field far from their children, whom they were never to see again. The baaing rose and fell, beating like the waves of memory on her ears, till she stopped them with her fingers.

She heard Tryphena moving on the stairs, and called to her—"How long will those sheep cry for their lambs, Tryphena? I can't bear to hear them; it's so cruel."

"Oh, for a few days. As for cruel, what's got to be, must be, cruel or no."

All the agony of loss swept over the mother, the agony of empty arms that felt in fancy the pressure of a warm body; all the beauty and mystery of the world could be no consolation with the inarticulate wailing of these robbed creatures sounding through her heart.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE RUBICON

"How's that?" said Dr. Tony to the two men who pored with anxious faces over a bared arm that lay stretched across the table under the circle of light from the central gas-jet.

The possessor of the arm, a stunted artisan who looked as if he had breathed nothing but tainted air all his life, blinked in the strong light out of great, black-circled eyes, almost with an air of proud possession; it was a great day in his life, the day that brought Councillor Meech and two doctors to look at his arm.

"Dropped hand," said Dr. Earwaker, winking nervously, with his ferret eyes fixed on the councillor, who stood with contemptuous, pursed-out lips, for he had not yet summed up the situation. Dr. Earwaker, too, was possessed by a great wonder, since his rival had never before had a good word to throw him; and here was he, Dr. Earwaker, in Dr. Tony's house, in what seemed to his incredulous mind a consultation.

"You'll take your Bible oath?" said Dr. Tony, recklessly regardless of whatever professional manner he may have once possessed.

"I'll take any number of oaths," said the other, truculently.

"And the cause?" asked Dr. Tony.

"Lead-poisoning," said Dr. Earwaker, querulously, "as you know as well as I."

The voluntary muscles of the forearm had become paralyzed and the hand was useless; it had "dropped," and could not be raised at all, for the extensors were affected.

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"Been working at lead-piping, my man?" he asked.

"I'm a carpenter by trade, and I hain't touched a bit of lead as I know by for months," said the man.

"There, you can go, we've seen enough; Dr. Borlace'll soon put it right for you," said the councillor, testily. "It's a curious case that the doctor thought we'd like to see," he added in a tone of large explanation.

"Ay," said the man, as he rose to go, while Dr. Tony gently slipped his arm into a sling, "they talk a deal of the lead-poisoning now in Challacombe. I can never mind the likes of it before, though I've been here a good few years."

He did not add that he knew the supposed source, the new water supply, for Dr. Tony's haggard, reckless face had called out all the chivalry in his mind.

"Now, what's the meaning of this?" said the councillor when the man was gone.

Dr. Earwaker had withdrawn and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, watching the two others. The rival practitioner had a long white beard, and ought to have been reverend looking, but was not, for shifty, watery eyes, born of gin-tipping, combined with a laxity of every line in his face that ought to have been taut, do not give a reverence of aspect. Dr. Earwaker had been worsted in the battle for self-control, that battle which all Adam's children wage first or last, or rather, first and last. Just now he looked alert, for a little farce was being worked for his benefit.

"Why are we, Dr. Earwaker and me," continued Mr. Meech, with a wave of his left hand towards the man in the background, "why are we summoned to look in at your patients? You'll be calling in every councillor soon to bear a hand every time there's a broken leg," he ended, with a rough laugh. Bluster is a commonly used weapon in many trying situations.

"I called you in," said Dr. Tony, sinking wearily into

a chair that stood by the table, and carefully avoiding the eyes of both men, "because it's my duty, which I have neglected till I'm ashamed to crawl on the earth, to show plainly that we've done a great wrong, that we've brought disease into Challacombe instead of health. I've told you before, but here's proof for you." His head had sunk forward on his breast; he had come to the end of a long struggle with himself, a struggle fought in silence, as Dr. Tony always found it most difficult to fight; all excitement, even all interest in his own words, seemed to fail him. Weariness, mingled with relief, was all that he actually felt now that the crisis had come.

"Speak for yourself," said the councillor, savagely; "if you, as medical officer, have done what you say, don't attempt to throw the blame on anybody else. You've misled the Board, that's what you've done, and now you come sneaking under other folks' coat-tails. I shall take care to make your position clear at the next meeting of the Board."

"I've no doubt you will," said Dr. Tony, quietly. "I've no desire to do anything but bear my own burdens. All I care for now is that the matter shall be put right by new pipes. I shall send in my resignation shortly."

"And that shan't do you much good," snorted Mr. Meech, his wrath leaping the bounds. "I'll take good care that you shan't get off scot-free, without anybody knowing what you've been up to. I'll publish it, the public shall know what sort of fellow the present Challacombe medical officer is."

"That's why I asked Earwaker here," put in Dr. Tony.

"Knowing that his tongue is so loose on its hinges that the pretty tale of the dropped hand'll be all over the town in two days," roared the councillor.

"I think we've had about enough of this interview," said Dr. Tony, rising, "and Dr. Earwaker is present in the room, Mr. Meech."

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"And his tongue is very much at your service, Dr. Borlace," put in Dr. Earwaker, quietly. He had once been a gentleman, before he had married Annie Varcoe, who had filled his house for him with squalor and squalling brats.

"It's a put-up job then between you," said Mr. Meech, struggling with his overcoat. "It's precious little chance there is for you, Dr. Earwaker, of getting the medical officer's post that'll soon be going a begging—not if I've anything to say in the matter, that's to say."

"I had not counted on your vote, councillor—a prophet hath no honour, you know."

"Ugh! you with your New Testament now," groaned the councillor from the doorway.

Dr. Tony sat where he was, and Dr. Earwaker saw the man out of the house.

"I'd rather," said Dr. Tony, as the other came back, "be the meanest little stoker of the eternal bonfire than live through the last few weeks again. If ever a man felt a wholesale murderer, a regular Borgia, I have."

"And now you're going to face 'em?"

"I've done it; I wrote the report to the Council before I sent round for you."

"And to-morrow they'll rake up all your sins of omission and commission," assented Dr. Earwaker, quietly.

"Ay, I've calculated on that. I'm done-beat. I've ruined myself, it's the end of me. They'll find plenty for a handle against me; there's old Quiller, the chronic, that I didn't go to see when they sent for me one night and that died before morning. Oh yes, the only question is how many votes of censure they can get in. Professionally, *Non sum*."

"Oh, I've been that for years," said Dr. Earwaker, with a grin.

There came a flash across Dr. Borlace's face that Earwaker took for contempt.



"Oh yes," he said, with a deprecating shrug—the man was a bundle of ill-used nerves—"I've got habits—that are well known—I've gone under, a fact also well known."

"Two derelicts, hey?" said Dr. Tony, slapping him noisily on the back as they stood side by side. "Never mind, old buck, you've a wife and children and I've naught. Naked I came into the world, naked I go out."

"Your wife," began Dr. Earwaker.

"My wife's cut and run; I wasn't good enough for her—but that's another story."

Dr. Earwaker took the hint. "Don't think I shall fill your shoes," he said quietly; "they'll never give me the work, I'm too well known here. I know it would go against the grain with you to feel that a blunderer such as I should go on with what you've been doing."

Dr. Tony winced; he had not known that he had made his feelings so clear.

"Don't talk about blundering to me," he said, holding out a hand; "you've never done your blundering in the wholesale fashion I have."

They solemnly shook hands with a better appreciation of each other's merits than years of plain sailing could have produced.

Left to himself, Dr. Borlace sat down in the chair by his desk, bent only on one object—to make irrevocable the step he had taken. For one never knew how the Urban Council would act; they might even at this last moment try to hush the matter up. For this was now February, and the next summer was to have brought the first visitors to the town, which had now for months been constantly puffed as a new West Coast health resort. The question before Dr. Borlace was how he could so force the hand of the authorities that there could be no possibility of concealment. Mentally he saw the headlines in the local papers, the

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headlines he, indeed, now desired to produce—"Challacombe Medical Officer and the Urban District Council: Vote of Censure passed; a Stormy Meeting, Town threatened with Wholesale Blood-poisoning." There ought to be at least two columns of report and a leader on public morality.

The doctor laughed sardonically, but he was none the less intent on being able to say, like Sir Thomas More, "In good faith I rejoice that I have given the devil a foul fall, because I have with these lords gone so far that without great shame I can never go back." For, in the great fight over our own weakness, the whole knack of conquest lies in seizing the impulses that rise in one ere the first passion of them dies. Late into the night the doctor worked at his table, for he distrusted to-morrow's stolidity. First, he wrote to Patient, the editor, asking him to announce that a public meeting would be convened of the ratepayers of Challacombe, so that the public might be made fully acquainted with the facts of the case. Then he prepared a bill of the same meeting to be printed for posting on the walls of Challacombe within the next ten days, re-wrote his resignation as medical officer, with characteristic truculency explaining, in answer to a letter from the clerk that lay on his desk, that the reason he had not attended the last Board meeting was that the notice of it served to him had not explained whether 11 a.m. or p.m. was meant as to the time of meeting.

"That'll fetch the blood up in 'em," quoth he, with a grin. For at intervals Dr. Tony was capable of enjoying his own humiliation. All that winter every sin ever committed by him had been raked up, Wilmot's absence not by any means improving matters, for the general opinion began to be that "she had her reasons." Just at first he received each blow with a cheerful "All hail," in a passion of martyrdom, till at length all things became shadowy

images, simulacra, of the real, as it is said become the objects to the racked in a torture chamber.

Late in the night, after the decisive letters had been posted, when the lust of battle had died down, instead of the noise of doubly redoubled blows on his armour of recklessness, he heard the steps of the years as they come to one who has gone under. Those who are old must often look back, if brain-ossification has unmercifully left them the power, on all they were to have been and are not. They bear the burden of unfulfilled ambition peacefully, because the realization comes with lagging steps: to Dr. Tony it came as a sudden revelation. The poor rooms he had visited as a helpful friend, which he had hoped to make less squalid, came like the visions of so many curses, for he had brought only more disease and suffering: as for Wilmot, the times she had shrunk from his touch, not the times she had been friendly, came as scorching to his thoughts as the shiver of repulsion must have come to a new-made leper. The good of it all—of the dreary earnings of half-crowns to pay for new boots and a bottle of whisky at times? He had often said the same as he filled an old pauper's snuff-box from his own.

There were many means of freedom for himself out in the surgery, but his limbs were much too tired to drag him across the hall, through the dining-room and kitchen—all that way to a more or less painful death. Then he laughed noiselessly, with grimaces, like "an octopus in a fit," as Wilmot would have said. Put the poison on the table before him, and there would not be enough initiative in him to put it to his lips, much less to swallow it. Faugh! it was too drastic—everything was too drastic, save sinking into cowardice and beggary. To cut the vital thread with edge of vile reproach, without the penny cord—that was more his style.

Gradually his eyelids fell, and a great power of sleep

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came down on his tired senses. He had not slept, save by troubled starts, for many nights, and the gradual oncoming of unconsciousness was bliss. He had forgotten to fill the lamp with oil, and it burnt lower and lower in the socket till the light flickered suddenly out, just as Dr. Tony pushed aside the books on the desk to make way for his cramped arms and heavy head. With a pleasant flash he remembered the little delights that still survive for a maimed animal, the sinking to sleep, the basking under a sunny wall, nay, the pleasant savour of hot food and drink on a cold day. The thought had often kept him, as it did Pierre Loti, from the destruction of a maimed cat or half-starved cur; he had come to accept life on the same terms for himself. As the friendly darkness nestled down, unclasping clenched hand and touching the shadows under his eyes, he heard the sound of a footfall and the rustle of a woman's dress on the landing above. It was Johanna restlessly keeping watch, but in half-dream he thought it the sound of his wife's step, for to darkness and sleep we are all children to be soothed by the fiction of a kindly lie.

"What's this I hear about your calling a meeting of rate-payers, doctor?" said Captain Penrice the next evening as he met Dr. Borlace at the door of Dashpers.

"Come in and I'll tell you," said Dr. Tony, leading the way into the consulting-room, and searching for the matches.

"You know," said Dr. Tony, fumbling for his pipe, "what I said to you once about being obliged to play the hypocrite if you go on the mind tack."

"I do."

"Well, I went on that principle long enough, but when it comes to poisoning a township wholesale, I draw the line there. What I feared has happened, and we haven't had the new water supply in for four months yet."

"They want you to hush it up?"

"They have wanted, but they can't now. I've made a full report and I've sent in my resignation."

"But the meeting?"

"There's no other way of rousing the public, for Patient won't stir a finger. The press is dead against exposure. I doubt if they'll even write a report of proceedings."

"Which are likely to be lively?"

"They are."

"I'll be there, Borlace. You can put me down for the chair, if you've nobody else."

"You'll be the only one there that isn't dead against what I'm doing, you know."

"I'll be there," repeated the captain, quietly. "What are you about, Borlace, that's what I should like to know?"

"Chucking the whole concern, that's what I'm about," said the doctor, reaching for the whisky. "It's all U P with the practice after this shindy, for those who put most pressure on me to blink the question of the material of the pipes will be the very first now to put the blame on me. But, after all, none of 'em really worked the oracle but—your niece."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Mean? Why, that I've half poisoned the place to look fine in the eyes of a woman that never cared two straws what I did. Lord, it's as good as a play, in its way. I wanted to go peacocking about as the saviour of Challacombe, in her eyes, that is. And all the while, she didn't care a tinker's cuss what I did. Conflict between public and private duty, that's what the writing Johnnies call it. And public went smash; now I pay up, that's all."

Captain Penrice found nothing to say, because there was nothing: he believed it a correct summary.

"But," at last he said, hesitating, "what of Wilmot? What's in your mind about her? Here's February, and the months go by and——"

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"I'll never stir a finger to bring her back, if that's what you mean," said Dr. Tony, fiercely. "At first I could have killed her for the way she's stood aside when I've been going through the mill. But now I see it's right enough."

"Right?"

"Yes, right," said the doctor, raising his voice. "See here; this thing goes deeper than you'd think at first. I've thought it over inside out these past weeks. We educate and we stimulate the nervous system of our women by all means in our power, and then complain when they find the nervous strain of child-bearing and rearing, the fret of married life, too hard for 'em. I tell you, it's all wrong. Women like Wilmot are incapable of taking what I call the face-value of things: they want to go down—down into the nature of this child-rearing business. And it won't bear it, and they can't bear it. You must have a certain amount of torpor in the nervous system, if not the mental, in a woman if she isn't to suffer damnably in the average married life. And I don't mean merely physical suffering, or even chiefly that, though, deuce knows, your stolid hand-worker never knows what the other one has to bear."

"Yes," said the captain, beginning to quarter-deck up and down the room, "what you say may be right enough. I've thought something like it myself, too, sometimes. But, there's the other side—she can't go on living alone, neither wife nor maid. And you—don't you come in anywhere?"

"It's not easy to speak of," said the doctor at last, "but—we ought to have known better when we pushed things on—we, who knew the world. Why, man, I tell you she feared me, shrank from me. The child would have made all right, for we'd a common, an almost impersonal interest there, and it's something impersonal that your high-strung woman wants. But that went, you see."

"But you—don't you come in?" repeated the captain.

"In this, I don't, Cap'en Dickie. And let me tell you, you don't either. There must be no coming between us here, not even by you. You'll give me your word on that point?"

"I will," said Cap'en Penrice. "I doubt I've bungled too often before to risk that. 'Tis steering into a fog-bed, to go straight a-head here. But the position's unthinkable."

"Not so unthinkable as to work upon her pity to share ruin with a man she can't bear to touch her. You know how it is when you try to best a man—how you turn the screw tighter and tighter till it's just the last little twist that does the job. Oh yes, between us we might give that last little twist and bring Wilmot back. But I'll not have it done. She's free for me till she chooses to come."

It was an ultimatum, but it left the last thought of both still unexpressed—that in a woman's life, emptied, not merely empty, seven devils, in the form of a *tertium quid*, are apt to take up their abode. Man-like, the doctor and the captain refused the verbal plunge that Johanna or Tryphena would have taken long ago.

"Do you know, I hear her dress rustle about the house, till you'd say I'd got the jim-jams coming on," said the doctor, between the puffs of his pipe. "Tell you what it is—the way to do with women is to wait till they're mellow, till they know the value of taking everything at its face-value, 'cos t'other only lands you in the bottomless pit—and they've found that out for themselves."

"Ay, they're safer," said the captain, doubtfully; "but I'm not so sure that the mellow ones, too, aren't capable of a trip to the bottom of things time and again."

"Miss Pen been emotional lately, eh, captain?" asked the doctor, with a wink. There was something of Heine about his jokes in the midst of an aching universe.

But the captain never quivered an eyelash.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE "TERTIUM QUID"

GREAT portrait-painters, who possess the power of tearing a temperament from its fleshy habitation, prefer to paint men characteristically engaged—your jovial toper with his glass, your fiddler with his bow. Such an artist might have painted Roger Hannaford as, bending his brows into the two vertical lines of thought between the eyes, he leant forward across the back of a chair, putting his point of view to the assembled moormen. It was the peasant articulate, thought Wilmot, as, grasping Tryphena's arm to steady herself, she stood on a form at the back of the room, above the close-packed heads of the crowd.

Langdons, Fords, Balsams, Nosworthys, Hannafords, Coakers, Hamblens, Cleaves ; they were all there, or out in the churchyard close by, gathered round the chief church of the moor, to which from all points of the compass in days gone by there radiated the corpse roads from the central wilderness of Dartmoor, for this was then the only burial-place for the moormen. It is a red race for the most part, since the hard-bitten faces weather, not grey, like their granite, but red, the rusty red of the fox, for iron courses in the blood on these wind-swept uplands. Strangely enough, however, the girls who do not marry early often become waxen and anæmic, probably from the fact that the very condition of life here is struggle with the outdoor world, a struggle which these unmarried women cannot share by the side of the men, as do their married kinswomen.



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Some families, by the help of the pony-farming and ven-ville rights, have struggled on for many generations in possession of their small farms, of sixty acres or so, but more often they have been obliged to sell their holdings to the large land-owners, who were to-night represented on the platform as soliciting the votes of the moormen for a political candidate who desired to represent them in the imperial Parliament. And it was a very "imperial" meeting, indeed, from the placards proclaiming the unity of the Empire to the songs that hailed the flag.

But the onward march of empires passes over the heads of little people like these moor farmers, who had roared thoughtlessly at the beat of the big drums, but who now rejoiced in an uninvited speaker who could voice for them the immediate appeals to their own interests. For to keep life in one at all here is a matter of the stern niggardliness that makes a woman refuse to eat cream or eggs from her own farm, and makes a man eye the chance of "besting" his neighbour as keenly as a millionaire can—and with infinite excuse. If you feel inclined to blame the moorman's hardness, go out and look at the newtake land, with its thin crops of oats or barley and large crops of stone.

"You have heard," said Roger Hannaford, in a deep booming voice that sounded pleasantly in the stifling air, like the imprisoned beat of the waves against the side of a cave, "that the granite industry of Dartmoor has practically failed, and that this has thrown many out of work and brought much poverty here. Every one of you can witness to the truth of this. You have also heard that when the tramways at Tormohun wanted granite, although Tormohun is close to our moors, the granite was shipped from—Norway."

"Shame!" from the audience, who had listened in dead silence to this same point as explained by a "foreigner," otherwise stranger.

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"Yes, it is a shame ; but let us think for a moment why the Dartmoor granite was not used. You all know the answer : because the tramway company could get it cheaper from Norway than they could from Dartmoor. Now, why was that ? Because we wanted energy and public-spiritedness enough to—do what ? 'Put a tax on Norway granite, and so slap the faces of our brothers over the seas,' said the speaker. Is that what you say ?"

"No," shouted an old man from the back ; "the granite railway."

"Yes," answered Hannaford, "build a granite railway, keep it going, and supply the granite from our very doors, because we have the sense to use our own powers. But, because we had not enough grit to keep up a simple undertaking like our own granite line, because we dropped it and turned weaklings, we are—to grasp an advantage from the Norwegians by a tax, just because they live over-sea and speak a different language."

There was silence, for, as every one in the room knew very well, most of those standing beneath the platform gained their living out of those who sat on it, and who must, therefore, not be contradicted.

"Getting a point too high for me," said a man next to Tryphena ; "but he's rubbing it in, is Roger. Shouldn't have thought 'twas in 'em."

"Who is he ?," asked Wilmot of Tryphena.

"Oh, he's been high learnt, for all he's not much better than the rest of 'em. His father married money, and he was the only son, so he went away to school, and he's more like a gentleman farmer than a working-man. Not but what his fields be clean, and they say he isn't losing money, for all his high-learnt notions."

The two men, the candidate and the farmer, stood for a second side by side—the first with a face that suited a

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sentimental drawing-room song with a wailing refrain, the other like a gallant old ballad with the whistle of the wind in its cadences. Roger Hannaford's skin, showing through the partly opened flannel shirt that gaped between a carelessly knotted tie, was the colour of sun-warmed earth, and his quiet eyes had something of the grey quiet of the hills. Suddenly Wilmot's eyes fell from his as they glanced across the crowd and locked with hers for a second, for in the power of some natures there is a note of steadfastness that rebukes restlessness. It is usually the presence of some old great man that brings the feeling, yet this man was scarcely forty. At the glance Wilmot rallied from the depression consequent on the stifling air and the impact of so many strident personalities, for here was a man waiting for the making or marring of a woman's hand, a woman like herself. It did not matter, she said to herself, what other women there had been in his life. This was something for her to "mull" with, in Mrs. Quick's favourite phrase. By this time the speeches were over, and Wilmot had escaped them by a mental flip of inattention that surprised herself, for she had been growing deadly serious in this solemn society.

"I want to speak to him. Quick, Tryphena," she said, as he strode down the fast-emptying room, where three hundred people had stood in a space meant for one hundred. "You must surely know him."

"Don't you be so forward," said Tryphena, who had been very silent and awkward all the evening. For a loud-voiced countrywoman loses all her self-possession in a public place, and gapes shamefacedly in corners.

"Mr. Hannaford," said Wilmot, laughingly holding Tryphena's arm in a relentless grasp, "here am I waiting for Tryphena to introduce us. She won't, so I must do it myself. I wanted to thank you for bringing some cool air into this hot place," she said composedly; "they were all

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talking of grasping and seizing and snatching with the strong hand, so that it was like a breath of moor wind to hear something of the other side."

"I'm afraid I could scarcely have done all that," he said gravely, as he stood aside in the doorway. "But shall I not help you to get your horse put in, if you and Tryphena are alone?"

"I can do it," said Tryphena, sourly.

"But Mr. Hannaford can do it better; you know the inn won't be easy to manage to-night."

A struggling crowd of grand people blocked the flight of mossy, break-neck steps outside, which were only lit by a lamp held up by a man on the top of the flight. At last they reached the bottom, with Roger's help. Here some one held up a lighted match, which flickered over the mass of heads.

"Hold'en up higher, man; 'tis making it worse the way you're doing it," shouted some one from the stairs. As the match flickered out, Wilmot saw that it had flamed in the hand of the much-revered candidate, who, out here in the darkness, found his true level as an inefficient human being.

With Tryphena's help, Bob was at last put into the humble cart, while Wilmot shivered against a wall in the gusts of wind. Then Roger disappeared in the crowded stables, in search of his own horse. The inn closed at ten, and as they drove down the hill the shouts of the thirsty crowd came after them.

Sitting behind, for Tryphena had given the front seat to a neighbour, Wilmot watched the regular cavalcade of horsemen that followed their cart. Gradually, one by one, they dropped off at the cross-roads, till only one remained—one who rode a horse with a white star on its forehead. The horseman, as he rose and fell in the stirrups, seemed a big man. Wilmot risked an inquiry.

"Mr. Hannaford?" she said softly.

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"Yes," came out of the darkness. "My road home is yours for half the way."

"Is your house a 'ford' or a 'worthy'?" she asked.

For most Dartmoor farms are one or the other.

"It's a 'worthy,'" he said—"it's Ponsworthy. And you?"

"Oh, I'm staying with Tryphena. I'm Wilmot Borlace. Won't you come and see me one day?" she said. "I want some one to talk to badly, but no one seems to call on anybody else here."

"Well, we don't go in much for that."

"But you'll come?—though I've scarcely courage to ask it, for you look like a shadowy fate riding behind me, or a fatal shadow, whichever you like."

"Here's my house," he said, after a pause.

It was lit by a faint flicker from one window.

"But you'll come?" she persisted.

If there had been any one to see the pout she would have pouted, because he had not shown enough gallantry to ride a step beyond his door. However, a grave "Yes" came from the darkness.

In truth, Wilmot was beginning to feel, not merely lonely, but actually starved for intercourse with some man or woman on an equal mental standpoint with herself. We never recognize how large a part books, pictures, the world of thought and of art, play in our lives till we turn our back on them. This man seemed to belong to her world more than any one she had met at Uppacott. She paid small heed, therefore, to the emotional possibilities of their acquaintance at the moment of her invitation.

Socially speaking, Roger Hannaford was what cliff-climbers call "crag-fast." By birth the son of a long line of moorland farmers, cultivating their own land, but scarcely removed by education and habit from the position of working men, he found himself lifted by an accident into a

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position of means, where, though by education fitted for a step upwards, he was yet unable to take that step.

He had been placed in his anomalous position by his father's second marriage to a well-to-do towns-woman, an heiress in a small way. This stepmother with her two young children having been suddenly killed by a carriage accident, the advantages of her money passed to Roger, the only child of the first marriage of Mr. Hannaford. He was sent to good schools, first, to a preparatory school, and finally to the famous mother of honest sons, to Blundell's. In a district where the farmers are working men, this fact raised him into a position which made it difficult for him to find a footing socially. The character of the man was well enough shown by his placid acquiescence in this obstacle placed in his way by old Mr. Hannaford. For with a little more selfishness and a little less apathy, he might have started life in more promising conditions, where he would have been accepted on his own merits, and not on those of his forbears. But, in truth, the tradition of his forbears was a bedrock quality of his nature; no man or woman had ever been wronged by a Hannaford, he often said; and added, though not aloud, for the Hannaford women were not discussed by their menfolk in public, "and no Hannaford child ever had any but a good mother." A little lacking in humour, perhaps, these Hannafords, and painfully niggard in their reading of that difficult word "good," but strong, and that too not only with the concentrated stupidity of a million asses, though a good many asses would have said so.

As Roger opened the door of Ponsworthy the Hannaford atmosphere met him on the threshold. It was made up of the ticking of two clocks, one in the living-room, the other in the corner of the flagged passage, leisurely beating out the Hannaford moments; the smell of burning peat,

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mingled with the scent of new bread ; the quiet falling of the ash from the quiet fire : peaceful security, free from the struggle of creeds or tariffs, yet never grossly material, because of the outdoor life that enwrapped it and the dead-and-gone generations that spoke as plainly o' nights as in any Japanese household : far enough removed from the automobile life.

Yet even here, in this fastness of Job ere the troubles came upon him, there was repining, for down the staircase, contending with the clock-beats, there came an old man's voice, saying, "Not for me, O Lord, not for me ;" for Mr. Hannaford on the loss of his second wife and the two children had not cursed God and died, but lived and denied, which is perhaps even less illuminating. He was firmly convinced that the loss had been brought upon him by some untraceable judgment that condemned an unknown sin. On all other points clear-headed and even shrewd, on this delusion he was an impregnable fortress, against which local preachers and the Established Church representatives alike hurled themselves in vain. It was still, after heated argument on the Divine sacrifice, "Not for me, O Lord, not for me." Yet in the business world those who had dealings with him found him hard as a stone, strictly just to the letter it is true, but as unerring in his aim as a law of nature. Outside business he was a chivalrous man, tender towards women and children, kindly and even generous. It almost seemed that the strain of business hardness persisted in him as an inheritance of his stern ancestors, like a vermiform appendage, or some other organ handed down from our bestial forefathers. It is often impossible, on any other theory, to account for the intrusive veins that emerge into regularly deposited strata of character, such mental "elvans," as the West-country miners call intrusive igneous rocks.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT

OVER Challacombe the frosty twinkling of the starlight lit up the vaults of space ; on the cliff edge the smoke from the houses below, caught by the wind from the sea, floated against the luminous background of sea and sky in strange threatening shapes, like an endless procession of souls passing up from the swelter of the earth life.

Or so it seemed to Miss Penaluna as she paced restlessly to and fro on the field-path from which she could look into the windows of Captain Penrice's house. The trees of his garden had been carefully thinned so that through the spaces the sea might be visible, and the stars shone through the tracery of bare boughs like golden apples caught in a net. Miss Penaluna was perfectly familiar with the sounds of the place, the incessant tree rustlings that came up from the whispering valley, for her own house opened higher up on the same direction, yet to-night every sound seemed strange and full of ominous suggestion, like a well-known landscape seen under the glow of a fire ; the gurgling rush of the water sucked in by a bullock from the stream at the bottom of the field sent the pulses quivering through her frame. To relieve the tension, she began to count the trees in the garden on the other side of the low hedge where she stood, forcibly rejecting from her attention any other pre-occupation. As she counted them, a light was lit in the captain's sitting-room, and beneath a half-lowered window-blind she could see the strong glow from a shaded



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lamp falling straight on his hands, laid across the table on the white cloth which was always kept spread for meals.

She could not take her eyes off those hands; gnarled, roughened, stained, she saw how they grasped from the way the pipe was held. They exercised a power over her that beat and hammered in the pulses of her heart and temples, for all the grip, the fighting force of the world, seemed symbolized by their breadth, their bossy finger-joints, even by the striated marks of the nails she remembered to have noted in the daylight; the power that girdles the sea and bridles the powers of the air, the male world of work, effort, achievement. Those homely members stood for all this to Miss Penaluna, for in the fear that possessed her at the moment, she was doing in mind what the great artist does for the world—painting the invisible through the visible.

Miss Penaluna's fancy to-night was endowed with the last best gift of the creative gods, the comfortable creature, homeliness, by means of which a Millet, with a peasant or two and a few clods of earth, can give us a vision of the age-long human patience; without which the greatest master of technique can but give us a "Charity" that moves us to nothing more vital than admiration of his flesh tints.

As she looked at these hands the soft inefficiency of her days shamed her. Warmth and food and shelter she had received at the hands of men—what payment had she ever rendered for all the flabby comfort of her days? The whole family of middle-class drawing-room women began to seem a set of cat-lapping idiots.

There were two circumstances driving Miss Penaluna to this terrible conclusion—fear and an intellectual sustenance too strong for her digestion. The fear was entirely irrational, but merely on that account the more terrifying, for on the mind-charts of lonely women there are marked innumerable vigias, signs of suspected reefs and islands, born, not of

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rum and sea-scare like the vigias of the sailorman, but of dammed-back fancies and frustrated instincts. This was the night of the meeting at which Dr. Tony was to explain his position to Challacombe, and at which Captain Penrice was to be chairman; this fact was the rum whence was born the vigia in question in Miss Penaluna. For the rest, the captain's books, among which Miss Penaluna had been ranging, were not of the drawing-room kind in which hearts never beat, nor thoughts flash, for fear exquisite clothes and conventions should be ruffled, but of that unclouted kind where the systole and diastole of the heart sound, instead of the frou-frou of clothes.

She awoke at last, as one wakes from sleep to the remembrance of some dread to be lived through in the coming day. "My dear soul, I can't," she whispered to herself; "don't ask it of me," for to her old self the new will, that drove her to the captain's door, was as impervious spirit to dull flesh. She had prepared many speeches with which to begin what she had in mind, but they all failed when Captain Penrice at last answered her knock. Then the blank look on his face irritated her; she wanted to wipe it off.

"There's a man that's dying," she said, "he's been asking for you. He can't go till you've seen him, and yet he's longing—there's something he must say to you."

To her own ears the tale sounded preposterous, as her voice tailed off into a little whistle of agitation.

"But you, Miss Dorothy, why should you have brought me word?"

"Oh, that's nothing. I happened to be visiting at Three Arms Cross, and I came on at once."

"Three Arms Cross; that's a goodish way to go, and there's that meeting."

"Oh, but you must come. The doctor can drive you back. He's there too, and if he's late, it won't matter

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about your being late too. Come at once," she said, laying hands on him in her excitement.

"Who in the world can it be?" he said, struggling into a coat. "Anyway, you'd best sit down a bit and rest, you're out of breath, and William shall get you a glass of wine."

"No, no, I couldn't touch anything. I must keep moving, it's frightened me so."

They walked quickly down the field-path, which was much shorter than the roadway to Three Arms Cross, which lies on the way to Regiswear.

Queer noises were sounding in Miss Penaluna's ears till she feared she was going to lose consciousness. There seemed a mist before her, but she heard the noises of the trees, and felt that the captain had drawn her hand under his arm.

"It's a good step," he said at last, "but you wouldn't have brought me out on a fool's errand, that's not like you, Miss Penaluna. I wouldn't be late for a good deal to-night. But I don't see there's any call for you to come."

He was resolutely talking, for he imagined that Miss Penaluna was upset by witnessing some accident, since he was unable to ascribe her agitation to any other cause.

"You didn't hear the name of the man, I suppose?" he said at last. She thought he looked at her curiously as they hurried along side by side.

"No," said Miss Penaluna, softly. She was thinking more of the ring of fire that seemed to be pressing on her temples than of the concoction of her story.

"I wouldn't miss to-night for a good deal," he said, after an awkward silence. "You see, the doctor's had no end of a struggle to get his way. Everybody set themselves against his washing the town's dirty linen in public, as they call it, but he's now practically no longer a servant of the Board, and I take it he's therefore a free agent. But he couldn't

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get a room, and we've had to rig up the old fish-packing warehouse down alongside the Overgang."

The raised steps, across the wall of which the trawlers smoke their morning pipes "down to quay," were called the Overgang.

"Surely," said Miss Penaluna, trying to understand that some one else was concerned in the night's drama besides Captain Penrice, "surely, you're only upholding him because you don't want to desert a friend in trouble, and not because you think he's doing right?"

"Well, you see, I'm not altogether sure which it is with me, for, after all, it's these poor devils of small householders who'll pay for this shindy, not the Council. Why shouldn't they hear plainly what's what—why they're to be made to pay the piper, and what it's all about? 'Tis like this: nobody will tell 'em both sides but the doctor. That's why I'm to the back of him."

"But they'll never listen, will they? I've been told there'll be a great disturbance. I've been warned not to go. They say they'll be more like wild beasts than . . ."

The captain chuckled. "Well, it isn't a place for you perhaps, but I've got a man or two ready to act as chucker-out anyway. I reckon we'll find a way to tackle 'em. It'll be a bit of a rough-and-tumble maybe, but Lord, what's that? Challacombe's bark is worse than its bite. And anyway, the man asks for a hearing, and if any man asks that, I always think it's but fair play to give it."

"Oh," said Miss Penaluna, beginning to tremble, "I've done wrong. What shall I do? But I never thought but what you'd be. . . . Oh, I don't know what I've done. I knew you'd be angry with me, but I kept thinking and thinking, and I see now how wrong I've been."

"Now," said the captain, stopping dead, "don't fret your gizzard, ma'am, more than you can help, for whatever

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it is you have done, I've no doubt 'twas with the best intentions, and that's all that can be asked of any one."

"There isn't any man ill. I said so because I wanted to make you too late to go to the meeting to-night. They've got something against you, something they're going to rake up. I don't know clearly what it is, for I wouldn't listen."

"Something against me," he said slowly, considering within himself. Then he laughed. "Well, my dear, there's a deal they might, of course, but I've never done my sinning or aught else in secret. I'm rather a house-top sinner, I be. Don't 'ee take it to heart anyway, 'tisin't worth it."

But Miss Penaluna knew more than she had told. "They say that you'll not be able to face all there'll be to face, for you've stood by Dr. Tony till there's men that hate you as they do him."

"Whew!" whistled the captain. "I see daylight now. And so you brought me out here to skulk in these lanes, because you thought me a coward that couldn't face 'em. You know more'n you've said."

"I don't know, and I don't want to," said Miss Penaluna, slipping her soft hand round his gnarled one.

"But you do," he said, holding her hand till she bit her lips to keep back a cry; "don't say what isn't true, my dear. It's true my mother bore me so that I get the horrors when I see the hate in a man's eyes."

"I didn't, I didn't, oh, Richard, I didn't know that was what they meant, or I'd never have brought you out! I know you're not a coward. I thought 'twas some old half-forgotten story they'd rake up against you."

"I'm safe enough when I'm hot. Just let me get a few words or blows in to warm me up, and I'm safe. You need not have been afraid for me, my dear, you'd not have heard me called coward."

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"Richard, don't you know me better than to think I'd ever believe such a thing of you. 'Tis I that's the coward for you."

"But," he said, putting both hands on her shoulders and holding her at arm's length, "if you thought they'd got some tale against me, why did you put yourself out of the way enough to humiliate yourself like this?"

Miss Penaluna looked straight at him in a way that would have gained her Tryphena White's everlasting condemnation.

He found his answer in a second in her glance. "By the Lord Harry, so that's it," he shouted.

Miss Penaluna was not in the least ashamed of the smarting tears that darted to her eyes.

"Eh," he said, exulting, "and it's good to feel that one's a man yet, and not an old dead dog. But you thought I'd show myself a coward, and that's worse than all."

"Richard," she said, trying hard to get down to stand by him in his humiliation, "'tis I that's the coward. Years ago there was a young man that cared for my sister, and she cared for him. But I separated them; she was younger than I, and believed what I said. And, if I didn't break her heart I took away the sunshine from her, just for my own pride, for I thought he wasn't high up enough for us. I couldn't bear to think how Challacombe would say we'd gone down in the world. Oh, Richard, I've been coward enough for a dozen, and I've feared such silly things, just a little tattle and a little scorn."

"And so that's your story, is it? Well, I'm black enough by the side of it, so that I daren't say, 'Dorothy, will 'ee have me, my dear?'"

"Do you mean it, Richard, though, even if you can't say it? For I don't think I can bear it if you don't."

"You blessed angel!" said Captain Dickie.

"And," said Miss Penaluna, "you know now why I

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couldn't bear you to go to that meeting. For I thought how I should have felt if they'd told of my meanness before all the town. I know what 'twould have been to me to hear it."

"And," said the captain to himself, with inward chuckle, "the doctor thinks the mellow ones take things at their face-value, and never make an excursion into the depths. Eh, my son, there's a thing or two yet for 'ee to learn. But," said he aloud, "I'll be in plenty of time for that meeting, after all, for we put it off till half-past eight, after all. I reckon you didn't know that, my dear," he chuckled.

Miss Penaluna was too happy to resent a crow at her expense. Holding hands like two children, they ran along the path back to Challacombe till her breath gave out. And then—never did the bullocks see such a sight again—the big man flung the little woman over his shoulder and laid foot to ground; to feel that his great strength had not deserted him was worth the humbling he had suffered, for the pleasantest moments of life are given by sudden recognitions of unknown strength or by sudden returns of a strength that one imagined lost for ever. And to-night Captain Penrice was endued with a Berserk vigour.

Johanna's mental chart, too, was starred in many places with suspected danger rocks as she watched the doctor on the days preceding the meeting, but she saw things from the other side, as it were, for, having a more accurate knowledge of Challacombe than Miss Penaluna, she was not afflicted with any exaggerated dread of the ferocity of its inhabitants. If the doctor would but keep control of himself Challacombe would show itself tame enough. It was exactly this, however, that she feared. To the doctor himself all things were unreal; like one just restored from blindness, he had no more concern about men than if they had been trees.

In order to see and hear the proceedings, without herself being seen, Johanna had provided a peep-hole

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for herself. By climbing up the twisted branches of an ancient ivy that grew on one side of the wall of the packing-shed, she could, herself unnoticed, since the crowd was pressing round the doors on the other side, peep through a window-slit into the room. The glass was shattered, and, by removing the last fragments of it, she could hear distinctly enough. The room was lit by lamps, placed against the rough walls at long intervals, so that in the centre only a tightly wedged mass of dark forms could be seen. On the platform, which had been rigged up at the end of the room, there sat the doctor's two supporters, Captain Penrice and Dr. Earwaker: as far as she could see, the bulk of the audience consisted of small trades-people and fishermen; not a single magnate could be discovered.

The cat-calls and whistles went on from the back of the room, and broke out with greater violence than ever when the captain was seen to be upon his feet. But his bull voice made itself heard.

"Now then," he shouted, "we'll just have the room cleared of a few of these boys, and then we'll get to work."

Half a dozen young fellows were thereupon hustled out by the stalwarts from the building yard, but, after a moment's lull, the noise began again, this time in the middle of the room.

"You'll have to turn us all out, cap'en," shouted a man from the back, "afore us'll hear 'ee."

Roars of laughter greeted this sally, when the captain was perceived to be quietly filling his pipe from his well-known pouch.

"All right," he shouted; "anyway, I'll have a pipe till you're ready."

Soon great puffs of refreshing smoke floated serenely down from the platform, and the crowd, sweltering and seething together, began to shake down.

Johanna dared not look at the doctor; she fixed her



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eyes instead on a little slut of a girl in the front row, who, in the dirty finery of a flowered hat, a pink blouse, and a heart-locket round her neck, seemed typical to Johanna of the stupidity of the set that condemned her master and brawled in this idiotic way to give him discomfort. Johanna was longing to "wring the neck of the little toad," as if the poor wench had possessed the incorporate neck of the assembly. But the crowd was beginning to tire of discomfort and tedium. One man shouted, "What's all this fuss about a drop of water, I should like to know?"

"There's some here, Bill Poad," shouted the captain, seeing his chance, "that lay more store on washing than you, and that sometimes drink something besides beer."

In the laugh that followed, the captain saw his chance. "Now, friends," he said, standing once more, "if you want to hear what the doctor's got to say for himself, you'd best keep quiet, and, if you don't, you'd better clear out. For staying here like herrings in a barrel don't do any manner of harm to anybody but yourself."

"That's so," shouted somebody.

"This that the doctor has to say concerns every man here that's a resident of Challacombe, and, let me tell you, if you don't hear the truth about this matter of the water-supply from the doctor himself, you'll hear it from nobody."

With that the captain sat down, and the doctor came forward. Johanna saw that he was holding himself in check, and she breathed more freely. For some time she could not hear clearly for the noise and the tumult of her pulses, but his concluding words came more firmly.

"I suppose that when you see me standing here to-night, you think I am come in some way to excuse myself. Well, if you think so, you're wrong. I am come to put the blame of what has been wrongly done on the right shoulders, and that is my own."

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The room was quiet enough now, for curiosity was aroused—hostile curiosity, maybe, but still curiosity.

“I am come to accuse no man, but myself. As you all know well enough, I am no longer Medical Officer for Challacombe, and my connection with the place will soon be at an end. Before I go I want the whole of the town to know the true facts of the case. When it was first proposed to bring a new water-supply into the town, I, of course, took into consideration, in advising it, the future of the town. In that future I still believe. There is every probability that sooner or later Challacombe will be a thriving health resort.”

“’Tisn’t thanks to you, though,” shouted a voice.

“No, it isn’t; it’s thanks to its position on the neck of a headland, swept by the sea on every side except one, with almost all the advantages of an island, without any of the disadvantages. Now, when it was proposed to get the water from Combe, I sent some of the water up to London from there to be analyzed. The result of the analysis showed that lead pipes would be dangerous with the Combe water, for that water, excellent though it is, would corrode the lead from the pipes and convey it to the consumer. The result of this would be the setting up of slow lead poisoning in those who used the water. This would probably cause nobody’s death, but would lower the health of residents and visitors all round. Now, you see, I was looking straight in the face of a proved law of chemistry, and there’s nothing in the world so certain as that the laws of nature cannot be broken. I knew all this perfectly, yet because the lead pipes were cheap and the iron ones, that would have made all right, dear, I blinked the question, and allowed the lead pipes to be used, because other towns use lead pipes with soft water. Challacombe is poor, and the water-supply badly wanted—so badly that if you hadn’t

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got Combe water, next summer you'd be having a bigger outbreak of typhoid than you've ever had before. Now, instead of typhoid, you've got lead poisoning among you. It's true enough that if you always let your taps run for some time before using the water, you will escape any danger, but nobody can reckon on every careless person in Challacombe doing that. Now the result of all this is that Challacombe rate-payers will have to supply the money for a new set of supply pipes from house to house, a second set, that is, made of the costly iron. The mains, of course, need not be touched, for they were made of the material I recommended in the first place."

"What I want to know," shouted a man from the back, "is why you wanted to ruin the town? For, wrap it up as you will, that's what it means—iron or lead pipes, it'll be said that Challacombe water's poisonous, and where will be the visitors then? Just you tell us that."

"I ruin the town?" shouted the doctor.

"Hem, hem," coughed Dr. Earwaker and Captain Penrice in chorus.

"I refuse," he said in a lower voice, "to be silent about what I know, what I have discovered in my practice. Do you sell dog-fish and call it plaice?"

"Us don't; they do up the country."

"No, you do nothing of the kind. And yet dog-fish is wholesome enough."

"They had a 'dog' supper down west, and they was all sick after it," yelled a great fellow under Johanna's wall.

"And they'll be a deal sicker with Challacombe water till the new pipes get put in," retorted the doctor. "Now, I've put the facts of the case plainly before you," he went on. "I tell you straight out that I ought to have said at once and stuck to it—nothing but iron; you can't juggle with the facts of nature. But the mischief can be remedied;

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the new ones will make all right, and when I am far away I shall hear of the flourishing watering-place of Challacombe. For if the visitors don't come this summer they will next; and remember this, that supposing we had done as some of you may still be wishing we had—hushed the thing up, it couldn't have been hushed up for ever, and your children would have had to pay for your cowardice—as you have now to pay for mine.”

To the accompaniment of a few quickly suppressed hisses the doctor ended.

“No, I'll not come in to-night, thanks,” he said to the captain as they reached Dashpers. “I'm pretty near dead-beat by now.”

“But they've heard you out; that's something to be thankful for, after all,” said Captain Penrice. “There would have been an ugly rush once or twice if it hadn't been for my men.”

Sick at heart, the doctor produced his latchkey and went indoors.

“There was once a philosopher, Johanna,” said the doctor, as she removed the supper-things that night, “who is said to have remarked—

“‘Wot's the good of anythink?  
Why, nothink.’

From what I have observed of the state of affairs in this planet, I should say he went as near the truth as any one. Here have I been toiling and slaving for a one-horse shay sort of place like this, and the first mistake I make they sack me like an old coat. I'm going, you know, Johanna.”

“I heard you say so to-night, sir,” she said quietly, arranging the whisky and soda apparatus.

“So you heard me to-night. And there wasn't a generous impulse in the lot of 'em either, not one. I'd sooner on the whole that they'd broken my windows with

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a shower of stones as they do in a certain play, Johanna, where there's a man that's in something my position, than have had them as cold as stockfish—as they were. I tell you a sort of chill struck home to me from their fish-like natures," he grumbled, pouring out the whisky with a rush. "And I never gave it to 'em either, for the 'compact majority' of noodles that they are, as I might have, if I hadn't been on my best behaviour. Come to think of it though, the chap I told you of in the play hadn't any special truths about him, no more than I have, though he did talk as if he was in the front pew of the temple of truth."

Johanna watched him in perplexity.

"Come," he said at last, "go and get your work and bring it in here. I can't sit all night without a soul to speak to."

"Would you like a hand at cards, sir?" she said, in a shamed voice. "I can play poker or euchre quite well."

"Cut-throat euchre, can you? Good; get out the cards."

Johanna had been taught by a master, as the doctor soon perceived when they began to play.

"Gad, what a woman you are, Johanna," he said, as he watched her third deal, "a splendid woman; with a body like an Amazon and a head like a man. You ought to have been the mother of princes."

"Don't 'ee, sir," she winced.

"Johanna," he said curiously, as they began to play, "what's kept you straight so far? The child—or what? You must have found it precious dull."

"I couldn't go back on you, sir, after all you'd done for me," she said, forgetting her fine play for the moment.

"Eh, my word, so I'm the little tin god, then. Well, that's a new *rôle* for me to play. Talking of play, let's stop this rotten way," he said, sweeping off the counters to the floor. "By the way, I owe you your wages, don't I?"

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"I'll hand them over to you now, and we can begin to play on that."

Counting out the money from a loose handful of coins, he pushed it across the table to her.

"Talking of money," he said, "there'll be a sale here in a few weeks, for all the furniture will have to go. There'll be a man up to-morrow to look over the stuff, and you'll have to look out for a new place. I'll give you a splendid character, and you'd better move to a big town. Hadn't you better bring the little nipper up here to Dashpers for the few weeks that are left? It'll save you something."

"I couldn't do it," said Johanna, in a choked voice, throwing down her cards. "You've had enough to bear for me, God knows, and the folks would talk more'n ever—to have the child in the house here."

"As you please, as you please; the folks don't matter to me though."

"But must I go? Can't I go and be servant to 'ee, wherever the new place is? Can't I?"

"Good Lord, no. I shall get a berth as ship's surgeon, or something of the sort. No more 'practices' for me. And, Johanna, if there's anything your mistress would specially like to keep, just pack it up and send it. Don't let the men number it, and don't bother me about it. I'm not bankrupt. There's plenty to pay off every debt, so you're not wronging anybody by it."

They played on in silence after that, till the little heap of money was dwindling from the doctor's side to Johanna's. With scarlet cheeks and trembling lips, that the doctor watched curiously, the woman scooped up her gains. Was she so greedy for gain as all that? he asked himself. It was quite a new phase of her character.

At last he pushed back his chair. "You've cleared me out," he said, filling another tumbler of whisky and soda.

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"Now pick up your earnings and be off to bed. I'll have my revenge another night. But, my faith, you can play, Johanna."

She left the room, holding the coins pressed together in a heap against her breast. An hour later, after listening intently, she came down again. As she had expected, the doctor lay asleep on the couch, with the lamp just flickering down in its last jumps. Tiptoeing to the couch, she deftly fitted a rug round him, turned out the lamp, and flung open the top of the window.

"He'll have a headache to-morrow, if he gets no air all night," she said to herself. Standing between the window and the couch, and shading the candle in her hand from his face, she looked down on the sleeper, haggard, sallow, with drooping lower jaw and worn face.

"I can't bear it," she said under her breath. "There'll be nothing to live for then, for Lizabeth will be better without me, come a year or two."

Suddenly from the open window, with the cool rush of air into the hot room with its tired, up-all-night look, there came the chimes from the parish belfry—beautiful, clear, old bells, such as the middle ages knew how to cast. Holding her breath, in fear that he should awake, she listened to the sounds that seemed to tell of the mystery of purity, honest living, and clean ways. Was there nothing in all the world, she asked herself, that could work a sea-change in her and her like, blotting out the memories of the past? Would death itself do it to the body, an eternity of ages to the soul? She had never heard of the water of Lethe, but it was that for which she craved as she watched the doctor's face. For to live honestly now could never make non-existent that which had been, since present and future both live in the womb of the past. As she wondered, the chimes changed mockingly into "Auld Lang Syne," with a touch of devil's wit.

## CHAPTER XXV

### LOVE'S WORSHIP

"Iss, Webburn's below right enough, but 'tis a brave step before you'll hit un," said Daniel Leaman, opening the gate for Wilmot. "Maister Roger's down there potting a rabbit or two, for I heard 'en awhile back."

"Maister Roger?"

"Ay, Farmer Hannaford of Ponsworthy," said Daniel, raising his voice as though addressing a deaf person. Hereabouts a man usually goes by his surname and trade names, as Smith French, Carpenter Cleave, and the like.

"He'll put 'ee in the way of Webburn, if you're set on getting to it." Daniel spoke deprecatingly.

Wilmot laughed, for she was pursuing Roger Hannaford even more than the elusive Webburn. Several days had passed, and as yet he had shown no signs of desiring her further acquaintance; consequently, she was determined to explore the wooded recesses of the Webburn.

"If you're afeard of his gun, just holler to us. I know the womenfolk can't abide a gun. Farmer French's gun lost me my second pair of twins, I mind." A full-quivered man was Daniel. "Give a scritch to un, to let 'en know you're by, that's all. He's a civilized man, is Farmer Hannaford, and wouldn't scare a lady, leastways not for an old rabbit."

Thus encouraged, Wilmot plunged into the stony path that wound along the side of the valley, sometimes dipping low towards the water, and then suddenly rising upwards as if the Webburn had never been in its mind at all.

Deeper and deeper into its heart the trees received her,



till the silence of the winter woodlands was conquered by the roar of the Webburn as she neared the spot where two river valleys meet. The scent of water-weeds grew stronger, for the river being low owing to the dry season, the smell of them was unusually pungent. Then came the sound of some one crashing through the undergrowth.

"Can I get down to the Webburn anywhere?" she asked, wondering if he would remember her.

"It's a rough road, but as you've come so far it's a pity to go back. May I show you the way?"

She saw that he recognized her as he turned to lead the way towards the murmur below them.

"Now," said he at last, "here's a scramble; let me help you."

He held out his hand, and with a quiver she noted the bloodstain on it, doubtless from the rabbits he held in his hand.

The brown peaty water swirled between boulders and foamed in cascades at their feet. She noted the green of the crystal edging that hung from the granite ledge above the pool, living green and always there, yet never formed of the same drops; like the passions that rule mankind. Her companion had disappeared when she turned from the water; in a few seconds he reappeared, carrying a bundle of dead leaves in his arms, which he deposited on a flat boulder, whistling the while to an unseen dog. She saw from his manner that the leaves were intended for her; evidently he was the kind of man who knows how to surround a woman with an atmosphere of comfort. Roger Hannaford could do this with a bundle of dead leaves. She stretched herself gravely on the leaf couch, while he leant on his gun to watch her. Presently she felt a cold nose on her face and eager paws scratched her arm. It was a splendid golden-brown collie, with a huge white ruff. With

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an eager snuggle the creature stretched himself on the leaves by her side, and, sighing with pleasure, fell asleep. His pointed nails were brown with the mould in which he had been digging.

"Why have you never been to see me?" said Wilmot. The big man was delightful to play upon.

"I didn't think you meant it."

"Here I am in your wild fastnesses, pining with loneliness, and you didn't think I meant it! Besides, I always mean what I say."

Down the wind there came the sound of bells, faint, far-off, yet clear, through the tracery of leafless branches—ancient bells, older far than the peal at Challacombe, from the cathedral of the moor, telling of the bygone centuries and the simple lives that had passed. Sunny afternoons when the bee hums in the heather, winter mornings when the snow lies white, child-birth, the passing of the old, the throbbing bliss of marriage peals; it is of these things that the ancient bells speak, of centuries of simple English life.

There was something in this silent man that explained the bells. Suddenly Wilmot lifted her eyes to Roger's. For all their wordlessness the two understood each other better than many who have lived together for years.

"The past to the bells, the future to the violin, don't you think?" she said, clasping her hands round her knees. "The violin dreams of all there is in the golden future for us, when we are still young."

Then with a sudden pang she started up. The bells were for her, since surely her vivid time of life must be over.

"Look," she said, "the sun is going."

Halfway up the side of the valley the sunlight had fitted, and while the hilltop lay in sunlight, the cold shadow

filled the depths where they stood. A shiver passed down the valley, as the trees felt the coming of night.

"Let me take you to the top of Blackator," he said, as they prepared to scramble up again; "you can see the church tower of the bells from there. That is, if you aren't too tired."

"No, I should like it. Everything's splendid to me here, for I have come from the south coast, where it seems to be nothing but fogs, clammy mist, the smell of weed, and the shriek of gulls. Here, I feel new-made."

"Ah," he said, "I can understand that. I reckon, somehow, that I couldn't rub along off the granite. You see, we Hannafords have been here for generations; dozens of my forbears are over there, underground, in the shadow of the great tower."

"I come from the granite, too; only far west, where I really belong, we don't build towers, but cromlechs."

"Older and stranger too. But, if you don't mind a good pull, there's a straight way up, instead of the long roundabout you took."

"Let's go straight up, then. I hate roundabouts."

At last, panting and breathless, they emerged from the wood, and stood on the top of the tor. Westward, over Buckland Beacon, the sunset flamed behind the dark slopes, while the pale green of the cloudless sky backed the pines of the Auswell Rocks. A heron skimmed through the valley above the trees that clothed the Webburn valley in hazels and oaks and beeches.

"I'm glad you've seen it like this for the first time," said Roger, pointing up the valley.

On a plateau that jutted below a ring of tors, Hameldon to the one side and the Bonehills to the other, the square tower of the cathedral of the moor stood outlined against a black storm cloud under which the granite turned to a

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pearly whiteness that threw up every detail of the wrought stone. As they watched, the cloud passed and the whiteness faded to grey, as if a curtain had dropped over it.

"The man said what he meant, the chap that built that," said Roger, half envious of the power of expression shown by the architect of the tower. "Pretty nigh made of granite, he must have been, to build like that."

"It's difficult to do that, too, to show what you are, anyway, the few ways that come are so poor," said Wilmot.

"My difficulty is the other way about. There doesn't seem to be anything in me to express, nothing worth expressing, at any rate. Now, the man that made that tower had a mind of granite."

Slowly he worked at his thought, expressing it twice over—a very simple thought, too. Wilmot shivered, for it suddenly came to her that behind the shows the real thing waits, always slowly expressing itself, little as we know it. Her fears, her superstition, her blind dread, they had all been expressed in Avis. She knew now why women shrink from motherhood. It is a naked, unashamed method of self-expression, in which Nature twists the very heart of a woman out of her for the most casual gaze to note.

In silence they brushed through the dead bracken, whose stems, trodden by his riding-boots, sent up an acrid savour that was like the clean granite-heart made present to yet another sense. The faint afterglow lighted the Beacon, the green pallor was growing greener, and the organ from the church close by began to resound to the choir practice. Everything conspired to trick them into closer intimacy. The hymn was apposite—

"Abide with me ; fast falls the eventide ;  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

"Isn't that a lie?" said Wilmot, harshly. "When the bitter need comes, there is no help."

"Look at that," he said, nodding towards the darkening hills and the valley depths whence still came the murmur of the Webburn.

"The work of air, water, and seed. What answer is that?"

"And you and I that look at it?" he asked, in his simplicity, as if the extraordinary compound called human nature could ever answer any question.

"Iron and phosphates," she laughed, "that's what they say down there." She nodded where the outside world lay, beyond the frontier of granite and simple hearts.

"Stay here till—till you know better than that. You're not going away just yet, are you? Surely I shall see you again?"

"Perhaps," she said, laughing at the thought of how he had put abstract questioning aside at the beck of a highly human desire.

It was always the way. "Help of the helpless," they might sing in the hot little tabernacles; out on the hillside, there was just the human hunger.

Then a sudden thought struck her. "Yes, you shall see me again, if you'll give a party."

He stopped in speechless amaze.

"A real party, where we can dance. You have a big place; surely there's a barn that could be fitted up. I've never been to a real dance, either, and I've never seen Ponsworthy. And you must have a dance supper. I've never been to a proper dance, but I want to, before I'm white-haired. Look," she said, pointing to the waves of curled hair that lay piled on her head and crested with white on the summits, like curling waves foam-capped, "I'm coming to it rapidly."

Roger gasped, but succumbed.

In the March twilight, a few weeks later, the open

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doorway of the barn at Ponsworthy blazed with light and echoed with dance music. Wilmot stood for a moment on the threshold, with the pale light behind her. Then she moved down the room towards the host. A dance was just over, and it seemed that the couples formed into a long lane, that led to the compelling eyes that waited for her. Next, the outside world, the barn still smelling of hay, the dazzling lights, the chattering crowds, were gone, and the air seemed full of the clapping of hands, myriad hands, the hands of the world's lovers who welcomed a new-comer to their land.

So the two moved towards each other, while it seemed the spectators formed a bodyguard. The little figure, regally clad in a purple gown that opened over an underdress of white, Elizabethan fashion, the shining steel buckles on the square Elizabethan shoes, the eyes shining like a young snake's, the air that moved about her; Roger Hannaford saw nothing else, while his eyes drew hers. Neither knew how they met, but with her hand on his arm they turned away from the watching eyes for which they cared nothing. In their dance the stars seemed to rise and fall to the rhythm of hearts and feet.

Then they found themselves outside. Roger closed the door hurriedly, and with its closing the music faded to a low undertone. The impulses that moved them were one, though neither spoke; they both wanted the night silence and the big outside world.

"May I lift you over this?" he said, for the yard was gravelled, though ankle-deep in straw, and the square-toed shoes might suffer. Besides, there were love's reasons.

"That's the first word you've said to-night," she laughed.

The next moment her face was close to his, and as he lifted her the kindly wind blew a feathery touch of her hair

across his face. He paled as the honeysuckle scent filled his nostrils. Then he set her down at the end of the winding lane that leads moorwards. As the wind of it blew across their faces, he said—

"You'll be cold. How foolish of me to bring you out like this!"

"Cold to-night," she cried; "I'm alive to-night. I couldn't feel cold if I tried."

"Do you know why I have done such a queer thing—given this party to-night?"

"To have me come to it," she said promptly.

"And yet we know nothing of each other," he said wonderingly.

"You are you and I am I," she said confidently; "that's enough."

"Ay, that's enough to all time, you are you and I am I; 'tis a lover's confession of faith. You know I've waited for you all my life."

"And I for you," she said, and no suspicion of the truth of her words struck her.

They were walking side by side; he made no attempt to touch so much as a hand, for his love to-night was of too flame-like a quality to need fuller satisfaction than in eyesight. To him just now she was all the glory of woman; not Helen of Troy, not the serpent of old Nile herself could have spoken to him more fully of that power which sways creation, from the tides of the moon-loving earth to the tides in a man's heart.

And the moors held passion in check. Prone, crouching monsters, the tors stood out against the moonlight; the wind that swept across them brought with it the sense of space, till the dim lights of the farmhouses in the valley seemed like twinkling rushlights in the hall of the Parthenon. This was a fitting place for life lived in the grand manner.

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Suddenly he began to sing ; it was a hunting song, the "Hunting of Arscott of Tetcott," and his hand caught at hers as they swung along in time to the tune.

"Ah," she said, remembering that the catch was a hunting song, "you were shooting the first time we really met ; you had blood on your hand ; I saw it."

A sudden sense of the man in him swept over her. He answered it instantly, so quick was the air with their joint life.

"Look at me," he said imperatively, as she stopped, and her eyes fell below his.

Slowly, slowly, his look drew her face to his, and when their lips parted, she looked proudly into his face for a moment. Then he said, still holding her hands and gaze—

"When, in the years to come, we forget to love, we will think of this moment."

"The long years," she said dazedly—"long years for you and me."

Consciousness was still asleep in her, though dreaming restlessly with the dreams that precede awakening.

"Yes," he laughed, "when you wait for me in the fire-light, down at Ponsworthy, and your light shines over the moor like that." He pointed to the lights below.

"And then we shall remember again," she agreed.

Somewhere she knew that reality crouched waiting to fasten its claws in her, but its hour was not yet.

"All my life," she said dreamily, "I suppose I must have been waiting for this that has come to-night. How I have suffered, and how I shall suffer ! But it's worth it, it's worth it. Oh, that fog, that creeping sea-fog ! It's gone, and the moor wind blows."

She trailed her skirts regally over the heather and moor grass, a rich woman for once in her life to-night, and as she turned the foamy frills of white lace skirts gleamed,



for she was wearing some trousseau finery. A sudden sense of this wonderful white-clad body mastered him, and he flung his arm round the thickly gathered velvets that so quaintly marked the waist.

The dim forms of the terrified moor ponies stumbled to their feet as the lovers passed, and down beneath, in the trees of Ponsworthy, an owl hooted. Mice were plentiful, and he hooted for joy ; the death-cry of one sounded quite close to Wilmot and Roger as they passed through the yard, but to-night the human folks were too much alive to heed it. The past forgotten and the future ignored ; no mouse's death-cry could strike their deaf ears.

One day later the fire log at Uppacott sent up great showers of sparks into the open chimney as Wilmot kicked it with her foot. She watched the last of them catch in the cobwebs high up the square chimney and one by one flicker out into darkness. Then only the sooty banners that hung from the rough masonry waved slightly in the down-draught. The ancient flags of the kitchen floor round the hearth were warm to the touch as she sank on them, crouching nearer the friendly warmth. Outside the spring wind, keen and biting with a touch of frost, was covering the panes with misty fog circles that by morning would be crystal rime. The sharp stillness of great cold reigned everywhere, broken only by the occasional snapping of a twig. Nothing slept as all sleeps in autumn ; everything waited. And Wilmot waited—waited for her will to assert itself. Numb under the frost of shock, it quivered like the blood when it wakes from the frost sleep.

Suddenly the house-door opened ; it was Heber, wrapt round with many sacks against the night air and with his legs shielded in straw, girded below the knee with straps.

"Here, missie," he said, his breath curling foggily out of his frost-berimed beard, "here's a babby for 'ee."

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In his arm there nestled a lamb, just dropped in the bitter evening. The unwieldy legs were bent under it, and the helpless head nozzled feebly at the sacking where it lay.

"The mother's dead," said Heber, "and I reckoned it 'ud be dead too by morning, less I got it to the fire; and I'm too busy to look to it meself." He dropped it unceremoniously into Wilmot's lap, and bustled away to fill the lambs' kettle with warm milk.

Soon the tiny creature learnt the trick of the kettle, and the fat little tail began to wag with satisfaction at the comfort which was distending its thin flanks. The damp little milky nose was very comforting to Wilmot as her hand touched it in guiding the wayward nozzle.

"It is a shame to kill them," said she.

"Then don't you eat none," said Heber, "the next time it's mutton 'pon table."

Old Help, the only dog ever allowed in the house, and that only as a privilege of age, stretched himself luxuriously on the hot flags by Wilmot's side, and his head shared her lap with the suckling.

The firelight flickered over Heber on the settle as he watched the trio; he stretched his huge hairy limbs towards the blaze, so comforting in view of the cold night before him to be spent in "yanning." A red fox was Heber, for he only shaved on a Saturday night, and a week's red stubble covered his chin; beneath the close-drawn eyebrows his eyes flamed ruddily. A long, enormously big-jointed hand, freckled like a toad's, stretched lovingly towards the cider mug that, furred outside with the ashes of former warmings, now nestled in the peat layers, getting ready for the moment over which Heber's fancy had been hovering for hours, the moment when he swept the red hair round his lips aside and put them to the warm edge of the mug.

"Put your cap on, Heber," said Wilmot, seeing he had reluctantly taken it off.

"Thank 'ee kindly, miss," he said gratefully, resuming his head gear. "I be allays a-feared o' the cold striking innerds."

Heber's hairy pate was a standing disproof of the airy theory of hair-growing, since he scarcely ever went without a hat by day, indoors or out, and regularly donned a night-cap by night.

"Missus out?" he asked, with conversational intent.

"Yes," said Wilmot; "I'm all alone. Would this lamb have died with the mother if you hadn't found it?"

"Sure 'nuff, it would. 'Twould ha' crept closer n' closer into the dead cold wool, and by mornin' 'twould ha' been stiff with cold; 'tis a wake little mammet. Eh, but 'twill do well enough now; the little belly's swellin' up fine."

"So you were its providence."

"Eh, dear, there's queer providences down below here."

"You're an old man, and you must have learnt something. What is it makes things go so wrong?"

"Iss, there's a mort goes wrong. There's broods o' chickens get the gapes, and a whole flock o' sheep the foot rot, and for all a body can tell wi'out why or wherefore. They used to say 'twas all ill-wishtness, but I dunno about that. I say 'tis to larn us to put things right ourselves. I've learnt that from the doogs. There's t'doog there, old Help."

Help gave a little cosy yap, and started up with pricked ears.

"Lie down, you auld canoodling fool, you," said Heber, affectionately. "There's summat wrong wi' a sheep, we'll say; he'll never rest till I've been to see it. Backwards and forwards he'll run in a pretty stew. I couldn't tell 'ee how many he's saved by his old fussy ways, the old rip. And he's learnt, and so has us all to do."

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"But sometimes they're beyond help?"

"Only for want o' a bit o' knowledge mostly. Take murrain now; a man that's got the nerve and knows where to pierce—and the leastest bit out o' place means death—'ill save 'em by the hundred. And another man daren't. 'Tis all in that: in the man."

"And sometimes you've done wrong and you can't see the right. If you'd *given* your sheep murrain, Heber, wouldn't it be harder to bring help?"

"I doubt but it would," said Heber; "but that's all the coal-smoke."

"Coal-smoke?"

"Iss; 'tis bad for the eyes. Down there where you come from you can't see for it. Why, up here, us have eyes, and can see horses and sheep further than any town chaps can. 'Tis same with t'other sort of eyes. How can 'ee tell right hand from left when you dunno east from west? Get up to Mel Tor and see the south-west wind bringing up the clouds rolling over the moor, and the dry north wind blowin' 'em back. That's the way to see. Why, I mind I went once, though I've never been one to go about much, fifty miles away, and be darned if I could tell when I woke in the morning which was east and which was west. Reckon if I'd not found out I couldn't ha' told knife from fork, or man fro' woman, or right from wrong. Come up here, up to the ould moor, and you'll be able to get to see clear enough. But I must be moving."

The lamb lay still in Wilmot's lap, sleeping quietly in the warmth, and sucking at her fingers in the moments of half wakefulness which last so long with animals before they fall into the deeper sleep.

The touch of its moist lips awoke thought, and as the fire burnt lower the drop of the ash-flakes, soft as the first wet snow of winter against the panes, sent fiery pulses

through her veins. The need for action, for taking the initiative, always difficult to the natural woman, had come. She had waited on this man's action or on that, and only once, and that by impulse, not purpose, she had taken the lead. Now she knew that the direction of three lives lay with her and with no one else, for she, who had long watched for heroism in Dr. Borlace, had now to seek for plain, straight dealing in herself. And the sting of wrong-doing she felt now: that one can never put things right by any willingness to suffer in one's self, for by the great devil's wedlock of evil and pain, one can never suffer alone. The question now was, not whether she could escape suffering and lay hands on joy, for she must suffer either way. The question was— which man would suffer least, which one needed her most?

She knew the answer, for the baby lips of the lamb brought it. How could she forget her child, dead, yet claiming her still in memory? The lamb's touch spoke of things more ancient far than the mere household intimacy she had shared with the doctor and his child. Yet she knew this was no answer, for Tony had shown no anxiety about her all these months, had never given up anything for her, above all had never sinned to please or win her. Sinned much, loved much; it is the final test in the way of this curst star.

And Roger must sin to gain her. The light broke upon her mind, like the light that comes from the west, with the lightening of the cloud-folds, over the sullen green of trees when the summer is dying—a light that makes the new-turned furrows gleam like living velvet, that threatens, yet is clearer than the clear-shining of the noon-rays.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SHADOWS

THE countryman is usually left untouched by the first infirmity of common minds, that zeal for incessant activity, whether well or ill directed, which dogs the Puritan Teuton all his days, for he has learnt, through long watching of the slow process of seed growth and generation, that "doing" is something different from incessant uprooting and replanting, and that life is a thing to be savoured delicately, not bolted greedily. On the other hand, it is rare also to find among country folk any one who has developed the new sense that has given fresh meaning to life in tens of thousands of townsmen—that feeling of personal responsibility for the condition of the world in the days that are and the days that are to come. For the evils of life must be monstrous, intolerable, they must hit one in the eye, ere they strike the imagination of any but the finest spirits. Town life, therefore, makes the evil visible, while the comparative peace of country life does not.

Roger Hannaford was one of the few countrymen who have been struck with the evil and the thought of a possible cure. This extra sensitiveness was due to no triumph of the imagination, but to education, and, in a certain degree, to experience. For at the time that the second Mrs. Hannaford was alive, it had been intended to get him work in town, and he had even for a short time done clerk's work in Manchester. What he had seen there had made a lasting mark on his nature, especially after his introduction to certain writers on political economy and social history. He

had come to the conclusion that the cure must lie not only in "back to the land," but that the exodus to the land must be captained by countrymen. He contemplated, in short, a new lying down of the lion with the lamb, of the countryman and the townsman, for the joint purpose of solving some of the industrial troubles of the time. The age's work, in which he was minded to take his part, meant to him the union of the opposite pole of things, townsman and countryman, farmer and labourer, capitalist and operative; for purposes of common good, he might, perhaps, have added the union, for the common well-being, of two beings, never yet really yoked in the world's work—woman and man.

But if Roger was a "hop out of kin" in one way, his father was no less so in another. Old Mr. Hannaford was of those who cannot rest, to whom it has become stuff of the conscience to go on doing, and, working as he did with easy-going souls all around him, he had made a very tidy fortune in a small way. Now that he was partly paralyzed and laid by, mentally, with religious mania, he was none the less determined to work, vicariously, in the person of his son, and still with the same aim—the further enlargement of his lands, his cattle, his barns and garners. It was here that the two met in conflict, to the complete defeat of the younger man as far as anything but persistent, long-delayed purpose went. It could not well be otherwise, for the elder man had the whip hand completely in his grasp—the means, the far easier purpose, the more persistent temperament, the greater impetus derived from forces long turned in a given direction.

Life is made up of strange alternations, and the scenes of a man's experience range from the hall of the Parthenon to the back kitchen. On the morning after the party at Ponsworthy Roger found himself trying to face the facts of

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his position. According to the unbusiness-like country fashion, he was neither a partner with his father, nor the legally appointed manager of Ponsworthy, though the whole superintendence of it rested on his shoulders. Although at his father's death he would be a well-to-do man, yet he could not now, at middle age, count on a regular salary, or even a certain percentage of profits for his own use, and to set a wife down at the farm without a definite income by means of which living on a more refined scale could be introduced, would be to set her down among the habits of another and a coarser time. For the chief difficulty between one generation and another is, not the adjustment of abstract opinions, but of daily habits; a difference of opinion on the doctrine of the Trinity is a mere trifle, for practical purposes, compared with different views on shaving, hair-cutting, and the opening of windows, in those who have to live in the same house with one another. In these matters, though old Mr. Hannaford never came downstairs, he set the tune for the whole household. He had allowed certain alterations to be made in the conduct of business, though he constantly girded at these changes, but this was only because he could not help himself. One of these alterations was the keeping of regular account books, for, as he always boasted, during his active rule he had been able to carry in his head the record of the sales, profits, and losses for several years; new-fangled ways were just an excuse for imbecility on the part of the present generation, in his opinion.

The test of every man's quality is his attitude towards failure and misery, either in himself or others; whether he fights it, exploits it, ignores it, or sinks under it. Out of the infinite complexity of the universe each man seizes, artist-like, the material that shall build his nature. For this reason nothing short of infinite complexity, both of the



material and spiritual, is needed to satisfy the instincts of the myriads of human creatures that pass across this planet. Suffering, struggle, agony, are materials no less needed than joys, for flaming suns and dying weeds alike supply bricks for each man's life-work, the building of his own temperament.

Old Mr. Hannaford was of those who use the failures of others, not cruelly, but automatically; all his life he had hit the mark in the small things he undertook, all his life he had profited by the failures of others to hit their mark. He had succeeded so long that it seemed to him at last that man is always the master of misery, provided that he fight strongly. Then, when his wife and children were struck from him at a blow, he thought himself the one exception of the universe, for the very tool of trouble that he had used as an instrument was now used to strike him down, he who had reckoned himself, not the slave, but the master of pain. He even found a sort of exaltation in the idea that he alone out of all the world's millions stood apart from the guerdon won by the divine sacrifice. "Not for me, O Lord, not for me:" it could not be otherwise, since the very laws of the universe had been defied in his case.

"Father, I've something to say to you, something I want to talk over with you," said Roger, after the old man's mid-day meal had been cleared away.

He sat leaning forward on his stick by the side of the deal table where his book and spectacles lay. One of his peculiarities was a habit of scoring out and correcting passages in everything he read. A huge worm-eaten four-poster bed filled one corner of the room, with a smaller bed in the opposite corner for the lad who waited on him. The room was strangely bare, being uncarpeted, and only containing the clumsiest of bedroom furniture.

"Well?" said he, wrinkling his stubby face into a

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network of wrinkles that waved across his skin like a field of corn before a stiff breeze. Roger was nervous, but the old man's mind was more occupied with the tenderness of the young rabbit, whose bones he had just been picking, than with his son.

"If it's more about the Four Acres, there's no call to say it. You may as well spare your breath."

The planting of the Four Acres had been a point of dispute with him for the last five years. Roger had introduced modern methods into the great dairy that depended on the rich meadow pastures below the house, had even tried ensilage experiments, but the Four Acres was to the old man his last stronghold.

"I'm thinking of getting married, father, that's all. It isn't the Four Acres this time. I've been thinking lately that it was about time I settled down."

"Ay, you're getting on," said Mr. Hannaford, placidly bedewing himself with snuff. "Well, there's plenty of room here for two or three families. So that was what that randy last night meant. But you mid have given me a hint. Well, I'm agreeable, so long as I don't see too much of the young woman. But I always thought you felt yourself a cut above the folks about here. Which of 'em is it? Or are you just casting about in your mind which of 'em it shall be?"

"It isn't any of the young women about here," said Roger, impatiently beginning to stride up and down the bare floor.

"Oh, that's a pity. For I could ha' told you about the constitutions of every one of 'em, and what their family's been like back along to the great-great-grandfathers pretty nigh. There's not many new families hereabouts, unless it's the Congdens of Chittleford, and I know their part of the country well too. Gout comes every generation there."

"There are other things to speak of first, father, before we can come to that."

"What things?" he said sharply.

"I must see my way to a regular income in some shape before I can bring a wife here. There will have to be re-furnishing, more servants, life on a different scale altogether."

"Huh! so that's how you look at it, is it? As for that, a cheque will set that right, and I should hope there's nothing wrong with Ponsworthy as it is."

"Father, let me explain a little. You've heard me speak of the lady who's been staying at Uppacott."

"So that's it, is it? Well, Uppacott's a poor enough place, I should have thought."

"That's nothing to the point, for Uppacott is not her home. She's only lodging there."

"So she's a dainty piece, is she? I doubt but you're making a mistake, my son. For what do you know about her, after all? Much better take up with some one you know the breed of."

"She comes from near Bottreaux, of old yeoman stock the same as ourselves, but she's been brought up by an uncle who's given her tastes different from the women we see here. She's fine-strung, and somehow I cannot but feel that she'll weary of our plain ways. It's difficult, very difficult," he broke off hesitatingly. "For it wasn't fit for her last night, and I was glad she only stayed a few minutes. The chaps got very rough before the end, and she isn't of the make of the women here, though they're kind enough in their way. It's delicate china and cloam, father."

"Is that the kind of wench, my son, to bear strong sons to 'ee?"

"It's that woman or none other, father."

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"Bottreaux," said the old man, meditatively; "you ought to know more about her than you do. Selina Rouncevell would know, for Bottreaux's but a few houses."

"If you think I'm going to spy and make inquiries, you don't know me yet," said Roger, fiercely. "She's the woman I mean to marry, and that's quite enough for me."

"Well, well, you'd best bring her to see me. Better say next Sunday; I shall be clean-shaved then, and fit for her ladyship. But I tell you, it's a mistake. A good plain country woman, that understands a dairy and could lend a hand with the fowls, would be much wiser. But there, a cradleful will soon tame my lady. I shouldn't mind one or two of the little shavers about, after all. And you're getting on, you're getting on."

"But the fixed income, father? You know there ought to be a proper settlement between us. There ought to have been years ago."

"And you with a hunter! My father would have seen me hanged first, before he'd have thought of it," ejaculated the old man.

"Oh, that's all very well. I don't say I've not been all right, but it's all been hugger-mugger; and, after all, as things go here, you're a wealthy man."

"Humph! that's all you know about it. Well, I'll see. What about that mortgage of Nosworthy's? How's he been doing lately? I shall foreclose if he's in a bad way. He's not paid full interest for three years."

Roger shrugged his shoulders; he had respect for his father's business abilities, but he hated some of his methods.

"Poor devil!" he said. "He's on his last legs, I should say. I wouldn't hurry matters if I were you. He's had one stroke of bad luck after another, and in this drought his stock is suffering as badly as any man's."

But the old man, though he seemed to have dismissed the matter from his mind, was just now more concerned about his son's future wife than about Sam Nosworthy. After long cogitation, he carefully wrote a letter to Mrs. Rouncevell at Bottreaux, making inquiries about "Miss Wilmot Borlace," without stating the reason for his inquiries, but giving her to understand that he asked for a serious reason, "which she might easily guess."

This written, he gave it two days later to the boy who waited on him, to be posted in Ashbourne, and awaited results.

The spring came that year with a rush, for a fortnight's incessant rain turned the streams to rushing torrents that plunged through the valley-bottoms like the spirit of revolt, and covered the uplands with a filmy green among the dried moss of winter. The warm winds that followed burst the sheaths of the tree-buds and set the sap rising. The half-starved ponies scented the new savour of young grass, and even the stiff tendons of the old mares relaxed in the genial influence.

Roger rode down the lane to Uppacott from the moor above; as he rode, the weight of trouble, even of purpose, rose from him as if a heavy hand on his head had been lifted. On either side against the blue a maze of blackthorn blossoms, gleaming white and humming with bees, sprang from a carpet of whortleberry bushes, rosy with blossom. Beneath there were old granite walls, golden with lichen, and all set against a background purple with the stretches of hills where the sap was rising in millions of leaf-buds, and black in the higher slopes where the pine trees girdled the heather-clad summits. Over all lay the wonderful spring mist, luminous, sleeping in the hollows, turning red to gold and gold to green, so that all the colours dazzled the eyes in one splendour of triumph.

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From the yard gate Roger watched a picture in the sunlight, himself unnoticed as he sat his horse like a statue. Wilmot knelt among the scattered hay of the yard, holding out her arms to a toddling girl, who in tight shoes over sagging socks tottered across the stones. The sunlight gleamed on the woman's light-blue wrapper and on the downy head of the child as the two clasped each other. From the dairy Roger could hear the rattling of milk-pans on the stone shelves ; in the yard at the far end a calf of an inquiring mind had stuck his head in a basket, and was now in vain trying to shake himself free of it.

Still no sound came from the group in the centre, until Help himself, grown inquisitive at the long silence, came up to sniff. The sun glowed in the fox-brown depths of his fur till child and dog and woman faded into a mist before the wearied optic nerve of the watcher. Beneath his tan Roger's face whitened, for in the clasp of Wilmot's arms as she strained the child to her, in her lips that clung hungrily to the rosebud lips of the child, his doubts faded. The blood surged through him like the tide running up a narrow estuary, carrying away fears and scruples. For in strong minds at a moment of exaltation nature works like an artist, and in the quiver of a small creature's heart-beat she can show the pulsing of the powers that move the ages ; in the picture of a parish, the world.

He made no effort to arrest her attention as she lifted the child and carried it through the open gateway leading to the next farm, which stood back to back with Uppacott. He tied his horse by the bridle to the gate and walked down to the porch, walking quietly with hammering pulses. He heard her foot-fall over the stone long before even the dog heard it ; then he stepped out of the dusk as she entered from the sunlight. As he drew her to him he felt that she was sobbing, in long tearing gasps that frightened him for

her, but there were no tears on her cheeks as he laid his head to hers.

"My woman!" he said, with lips that whitened. That was all; the rest was spoken in the clasp of his arms.

"Hold me closer; make me forget," whispered Wilmot.

But he paid no heed to her words, though memory registered them, as she registers everything at such moments. As the shadows lengthened her sobs died down, and she grew quiet in the strength that carried all her fears into the current of its power.

"Come up on the hill," he said at last. "Let us have a few more moments alone."

Hand-in-hand, guarded, as it seemed, by the shadow of a passion that quieted her own feverish one, they went up towards the hill. In the shadow of the lane, where the blackthorn snow lay in swathes of white across the road, he took her chin in his hand and drew her face to his. From the murmuring of the bees in the whortleberry flowers, everything faded to the sound of their two lives flowing into one.

On the last part of the pull up to the summit of Mel Tor, Roger picked her up and deposited her panting in a rock chair of the granite outcrop.

"How long have you been sure, Roger?" she said at length; "for you have stayed away so long that I thought that night and all that followed must be a dream."

"When I watched you with that little one," he said simply, "I knew."

"No, no; don't say that, Roger, if you love me. Not that such a thing could make you sure. Oh, please go away; I want to be alone."

He laughed tenderly at the thought that her quick instinct had divined his visions.

Left alone, she settled closer into the rocks that kept off

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the wind in an almost cave-like fashion. After the excitement a deadly weariness weighed her down, and she fell from dazed fear at herself into a half-sleep that brought dreams. In a golden light that suggested the East, women gleaners gathered corn, while the light shifted and pulsed above the scarlets and pinks of their handkerchiefs ; then, as light faded, the dreamer saw that wrapped in the folds at the bosom of each woman's dress she carried a child bound close.

With a sudden shiver of fear, she awoke, to find the scene changed. A dirty haze was creeping over the sky, dun-coloured and lowering, against which the weathered rocks on the tors turned grey-white. As she hurried down to Uppacott, the fresh leaves gleamed yellow against the blackness. Whilst she stood for a moment in the porch, looking back, an arrow of forked lightning made her wink. She stood watching Tryphena driving the calves into the outhouse, with a fear that was scarcely thought darting through her, born of her sudden intuitive knowledge of Roger Hannaford. At last, though she had lived all these weeks at Uppacott without any fear of discovery, it now seemed that every wind from Challacombe must blow her hateful story to him.

Roger returned home to Ponsworthy in the aloofness that belongs to a great moment. He found his father looking out at the storm over the big Bible that was his usual companion. It was open to-day at the flyleaf where the generations of Hannafords were written, ending with the names, in much fresher ink, of his wife and two children, Roger's stepmother and half-sisters.

"Eh, my son," said the old man, "she'll need feeding up, will your little woman. More like a little bird than a woman, though. How many slices of bread and cream did you say she took when she had her tea here?"



"Three, I believe, father," laughed Roger.

"Ay; Ponsworthy cream isn't to be had every day. And I'll warn you didn't think of trying her with 'thunder and lightning.' Very fattening, too."

"I'm afraid we didn't," said Roger, smiling to see his father's good humour, which usually took the form of a zest for food and drink. "Thunder and lightning," or treacle on cream, is a peculiarly satisfying food.

"You'd best take the porch room for her when she comes. Oh yes," he said, lifting a deprecating hand as Roger began to protest, for it had been his stepsisters' nursery, and, as thus, kept sacred. "Oh yes; it's the best for chillern. There's more sun comes there, and the past is over and done with. It shan't be long, either, now before I follow it."

"But, my dear father, surely it's early days for nurseries yet."

"Ay, but it'll not be long, please God, and she's little but a child herself. I suppose there's no money with her?"

"I think not, or next to nothing. She told me once she should go to work in a town when she left Uppacott, so there can't be much."

"Tchuh, tchuh, to think of that, a little bird hopping about with the town sparrows."

"Ay, but that won't bear thinking about at all, father."

"She shan't be stinted, lad, she shan't be stinted, you needn't fear, when she comes here."

Mr. Hannaford had Wilmot in mind as in urgent need of sustenance, but as the two men gripped hands across the table, one could hardly recognize in him the man with a muck-rake whom most of his neighbours saw in him.

But Roger asked himself a question: "Make me forget! What was it she had to forget?" For her hold

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on the child, nay, even the child's very acquiescence in caresses that a baby usually repels, reminded him, in a thought which he thrust from him, of the way in which he had seen a mother grasp a child recovered from the moors. He cast the fancy into the lumber-room of his mind, where it moved like an animal in the recesses of a dark room.

Blinding darts of lightning flashed across the windows of the living rooms as Wilmot shut the house-door behind her. For the moment she felt that the inward balancing of the nerves which we call self-control was impossible, for the storm and her own fears were acting and reacting on one another. She began to walk up and down in the instinctive search for self-command, for the world had, for the time, resolved itself into a whirl of struggle, whither she knew not. Gradually, with the approach of calmness, the outer objects of the room began to make themselves felt, even to soothe. The long, low, black-raftered room, stretching the width of the house, was lighted by windows on each side; side-benches fastened to the walls, and of equal date with them, ran beneath the front windows to the fireplace, where the open hearth in part remained untouched. Half of it, however, had been cut off by a partition, on the other side of which an oven had been built, which could be screened from sight, when not in use, by a wooden door, set flush with the wall. The windows, crowded with pot plants, gave little light, save when the flashes of lightning threaded the fire-lit dusk.

At last Tryphena came in holding a lamp which flung yellow rays across the blue flags on the floor. Like everything else, they were polished to a quarter-deck spotlessness. Tryphena's neat check dress, big white apron, wholesome cheeks and twist of strong wiry hair finished the effect of the room. Wilmot could at last think connectedly.

"Where in the world have you been, in this storm and all?" she said excitedly. "I'd no one but Heber to send to look for 'ee, leave alone that I couldn't spare 'en, with Violet bad."

"I didn't know it was so late. Violet bad?"

"Bad, sure 'nough," said Tryphena, cheerily; a fresh trouble was to her but a fresh signal for conquest, born fighter as she was. "Inflammation as sharp as can be, they say. We've had to send for the vet. and then for tan, for she can hardly bear to put foot to ground, poor thing."

Violet was a valuable mare and, next to the young bull, the pride of Tryphena's heart.

"But what'll you have? A cup of tea, now," she said, dropping from excited narrative to bustling hospitality. "Hot milk? Hog's pudding? 'Twill take but a minute."

All the while the peat blocks she stirred amid the wood blocks sent a flying chorus of sparks up the chimney; the heartiest fire of all, peat and wood chunks.

"I don't want any tea," said Wilmot, turning her toes to the blaze and her frightened heart towards Tryphena.

"A more wisht little sawl, I wouldn't wish to see. Been bogged, have 'ee?" she said, taking one of Wilmot's feet in her hands and unlacing the wet shoe. "But just you run up timber-hill, have a wash, and come down to me. By then I'll have clapped on the gridiron and got 'ee something warm."

"Oh, Tryphena, I'm in such a mess. I don't know what to do."

"Nor you ain't likely to, with an empty stomach and little toes like melting ice. Just you do what I say," she said, filling a jug from the kettle, "put your feet in this and come down in the inside of five minutes."

Tryphena was as happy as a king, with a love-lorn

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woman and a sick animal on her hands at the same time. Later on she placed before Wilmot the still hissing piece of pudding, stood over her while she ate, and followed it up with "tough" cakes and a great ladleful of cream. Between whiles she ran across the yard to Heber, who was with Violet, flitting across like a human glow-worm with the horn lantern tied to her apron strings, thus leaving her hands free to convey cider and cake to Heber.

"Violet seems a bit easier," she announced. "She's got to have a drench every two hours, so I'm going to stay up with her to-night. Heber's too much up in years to have much of his rest broken, though I'll have to call 'en for the drench. I can't manage her alone."

"Can't I do it with you?" said Wilmot, rather angry at the greater interest in Violet shown by Tryphena. "I couldn't possibly sleep."

"And why shouldn't you sleep, I should like to know? And you wouldn't be any use if you sat up."

"Tryphena, you've been very kind, I wish you'd help me. I seem to be in pitch darkness."

"Got yourself into a caudle, have 'ee?" said Tryphena, pausing for a moment in her occupation of flying round the room tidying. "That's Roger Hannaford, of course. There's always a mess of things if you've a man about. I only put up with Heber because I'm used to 'en, and he's a capital hand with ponies and knowledgeable wi' the live stock. Besides he's got beyond the time when a man's mind runs on, 'Wilt thou have this woman?' They're well enough when they're ripe, so to speak, men be. Only they ripen uncommon late," she said, rubbing the tip of her nose resentfully with the end of a duster with which she had been quite unnecessarily rubbing down the table. "And what's worse," she said, standing with squared elbows, "you can't be sure of 'em even then, ripe or unripe. I'd a girl

here harvest time, a loitering poker with a kick in her gallop, and if I didn't catch Heber making sheep's eyes at her. He swore 'twas a lie when I charged 'en with it, but I know what it means when you see an aged reprobate like that going about dangling a pig's bucket with a Simple Simon sort of a smile on his face, the old rip," said Tryphena, twinkling like a mother who has found out a child in his first bit of mischief.

"I don't know what I'm to do, for whatever I do I shall hurt somebody so much."

"And do 'em good, too, if the somebody's a man. *They* hurt fast enough, and make no more of it than eating their dinner. Why the place isn't livable for 'em. But men's like fleas: there's some women they won't touch, and there's others they can't leave alone. Now I might sleep in a poultry house, and there wouldn't be a flea on me. Same with men. They leave me alone, thanks be."

A beast full of pith, your genuine man-hater.

"But I'm bound to go and look at Violet," she said, returning to business.

Wilmot went upstairs, but she could not rest. The light from the stable opposite made a glimmering cross of light on the walls in the dimly lit room, a cross that quivered as if with the pain it symbolized. Gazing at its wavering outline Wilmot thought of its story. Dr. Borlace had often told her of the genesis of the heart as a symbol, of how it had at first represented the arrow-head of the stone age and had then been sentimentalized into its present meaning. She could not remember if the cross was a pre-Christian symbol or not, like the figure of woman and child, the symbols of maternity and birth ere the life of the Virgin Mother.

Still the cross shifted before her with the flickering of the candle that cast it: Christian or pre-Christian, out of

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the depths of the past or quivering in to-morrow's sunlight, still the mark of it cut everywhere in the lives of men. Whether thrown by stable lantern or with the flashing of jewels, still it called for obedience, or seemed to, after ages of the heroic folly of inculcated self-abnegation. And yet, after all, was its demand sane? Why should any one voluntarily undergo pain in a world which is always automatically supplied with sufferers?

Of the three guides in the conflict of temptation, the mandate of a Divine law-giver, the reverence for the future of the race, or the hunger and thirst after righteousness, that spiritual analogue of physical cleanliness, the last alone acts instinctively, for it is the only one that is temperamental. The two former principles need logical precision, capacity for thought, the very last thing which can be supplied by a spirit in the throes of strife. Yet even the temperamental guide fails too, for want of mental insight. Wilmot wanted the clean life, but where was it? In struggles amid lowered ideals and hypocrisies, in makeshifts for the truth with Dr. Borlace, or in the simplicity of an honest life with Roger, which was not afraid to defy the world's estimate of rightness? But she could not answer since she could not tell whether their joint life, smirched in the world's eye, would seem to him hopelessly soiled, or only lifted to the altitude of the heroic. But there was no doubt that the evil of silence must continue no longer. She must speak. She went downstairs once more.

"Tryphena," she said, "come out on the moor with me for a little way. See, it's quite fine again and I cannot lie down or rest."

"No," said Tryphena, "if you think I'm going trapesing round the country to-night, you're wrong. Just you sit down there"—pointing to the settle—"and hear what I've got to say. I thought how 'twould be with all that decking of

yourself out. Now, you've got yourself into a caudle. If 'twas anyway possible, I should say, 'Take the both and be done with it.'

"Tony doesn't want me. He's never given a sign since I've been here, and before that he didn't care."

"And I should think he wouldn't when you went away and left him with all that to go through."

She pointed with her forefinger to a paragraph in an old copy of the weekly local paper.

"There," she said; "look at that. He's had something else to think of besides whimsies."

Wilmot read the account of the resignation of the Medical Officer of Challacombe and the subsequent proceedings at the meeting.

"So that's come," she said defiantly. "Well, it was but to be expected. He put himself in a false position all through."

"And somebody else is in a falser. Why, now I suppose you think that if you could chop and change men like a tramp woman, you'd be happy. If you could only get Roger Hannaford you'd be going to heaven, that's what it is, isn't it? Why, I tell you it will be all the same to 'ee which man you've took five years after marriage. And if 'twasn't so, there's Roger's father's that's one part totelin and three parts miserly, that rules the roost there, and *that's* what you'd have to put up with. And, let me tell you, that isn't all, for even if it so come about that he could marry 'ee, there isn't one of the Hannaford women that's ever been what the whole parish would call you."

"I do want to do what's right."

"No, you don't," snapped Tryphena; "you want to please yourself, same as everybody else does. Only your way of pleasing yourself is running after one man 'pon top of the other. Now, my notion's different. I don't lay

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any store in they truck. To earn my own bread honest, without depending on any man's enough for me. Men, they always fail you, if you depend on them. Why, look where men have brought us, everywhere—illness, misery, starvation; and that's men's rule. And here's little fools like you cockering 'em up by making 'em think 'tother matters from which. Which it don't. It's my belief that if the doctor'd just up and hit out a bit, you'd be all right. Why, I'd a hen called Speckley that wouldn't so much as look at the old cock, till there come a young cockerel that made up to her. At that the old cock fair beat the life out of the young 'un, he did. And Speckley changed from that minute, and she'd sidle up to the old one in a sickening way."

"Whatever I do, it seems somebody will have to suffer," repeated Wilmot, paying no heed to Speckley.

"And that's what you might have thought of before, I should have said. Why, if you care for anybody it seems to me you'd want to save 'em pain, not give it. And don't you make any mistake about it. Roger Hannaford 'll have to pay if you two go your own way. I'll warn he don't know anything. Does he now?"

"No."

"There now," said Tryphena, with uplifted hands; "and there's the doctor, too, taking 'ee for a little saint. I'm dalled if I wouldn't like to open a few eyes all round."

"Tryphena, you wouldn't."

"Well, no, there's trouble enough as 'tis, without folks going round telling others that their bed's made of sting-nettles when they took it for feathers. Good Lord, let 'em keep their feathers, say I, if 'tis any comfort to 'em, till they be blistered all over with nettles. But, mind, I will do it, if you don't," she finished illogically; "I take shame to myself for holding my tongue so long."



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE WRITING ON THE WALL

To the left the shoulder of Hameldon towered up like a crouching beast of the time before the flood, to the right the bastions of Hooknor cut the skyline and in front lay the moor, wind-swept, cloud-chased, the gathering place of rains between the two seas. Not a moorman's hut was to be seen, only far away on the other side of the hills the shifting light by seconds caught the walls of the great prison, which in this untamed wilderness still brings to the mind the rule of law. Buzzard, heron, crane, badger, otter, fox : shot, hunted, preserved, even here in the wilderness, yet still with something of the freedom of the earlier world, before the steam trails marked the iron road. Still over the moor the curlew calls and the moor-fox barks on his rabbit hunting when the dry heath rustles in the scented wind and the rushes bend together in the lap of the peaty stream. On these hills the fiat of the Hebrew lawgiver seemed to Wilmot but the echo from a far-off land as she lay back against a ruined stone wall set up by a people so far distant in time that not even a name remains to them. The crash of broken commandments lost its terror beside the bellowing of distant thunder on the tors to the southward where the clouds chased one another over pathless heights, green where the light fell, and the next moment blue-black with the shadow of the rain-cloud. Wandering mists caught the rocky summits and drifted downwards into the valleys to fall in silver rain. Then the golden light

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flashed on the scarred face of the wilder moorland to the right, showing up the black traces of fire and the scurfy patches where the peat had been cut.

As Wilmot watched, waiting for the thoughts that the wilderness can give to those who love her, the scuds of rain left the opposite hill grey with the rain-drops that lodged in the bracken, till the whole slope shimmered like iridescent satin and over the satin passed gigantic shadows, thrown by the racing clouds. It seemed like a phantom army of the bygone races who had tugged for a space at the breasts of the moor—and passed. Iberians, Britons, or Saxons they came and were but shadows, leaving only a few burial cairns, a few memorials to the dead, and most pitiful of all, because most intimate, many hut-circles and hearths. Lying in such a circle, with many more around her shut in by the enclosing double walls of Grimspound, she began to think of the builders. Had the men, but above all, had the women, ever agonized for a right or against a wrong, with a cruder judgment than her own, yet with a judgment human and not bestial? Fear they must have known, and yet what mattered now what they had feared? Did they fall or win: what matter? The hearth-fires burnt out, the walls fell for just and unjust alike, and only the budding ling shakes where once the crouching women shivered at the wolf-howls outside the double walls. How useless it all was, this struggle for right, for a little measure of honesty against the longing of weakness. One step awry and a lifetime of struggle. For what?

The moor found no answer but the *tout passe* that the cloud-shadows speak of, no less than do the hut-circles and rifed cairns. She dug up with her fingers a little fragment of peat made of myriad roots of moor plants. It smelt sweet, as no other earth can smell; soft, friable, an exquisite thing, yet worn from the hardest granite whence the plants

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had obtained their food. So underneath the *tout passe* of the wilderness there was granite: something strong and firm yet not unchangeable, since the everlasting hills change and the tors themselves, now lower than they were, are turning what was lake into marsh and from marsh will give land. It was something strong and firm like the granite, changing with changing ages, yet always there that she wanted, that man wants when the great winds blow the storm-clouds up and the daylight fades and the last fear comes, that loneliness which lies in wait round every milestone—right to the very end that no man knows.

As she watched the moorland a figure appeared on the path to the enclosure. The wind was blowing strongly behind it and brought towards her the scent of tobacco, which smelt like new-baked bread to the starving, for somehow in the sense of masculine calm that came with it, the pain of struggle faded into acquiescence with whatever the next hour might bring. It was Roger Hannaford who must have seen her pass Ponsworthy on her way to the Pound. With feminine half-intent she had hoped he would see her, though not for worlds would she so have acknowledged to herself. The dog caught sight of her and bounded forward, giving a warm lick to her bare feet before she could tuck them under her.

"You've a thorn in your foot," said his master, prosaically, as he too sat down in the hut circle, leaning against the foundation of granite blocks; "let me take it out for you."

He placed her left foot gravely against his bent knee, and as he did so the sensitive flesh seemed to quiver under his touch. It was a shapely foot, because much used to freedom from shoes and stockings; but Wilmot hated him to handle what, for all its shapeliness, always looks in a woman's eyes the least spiritual part of her, the one that

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links her most closely with her poor relations of the long ago.

"How did you know I was here?" she said, when the operation had been performed and she was trying to resume her natural tone.

All the thoughts that wandered down the centuries had gone now: it is one of man's best gifts to woman—that sense of placidity; without it a houseful of women grows as electric as a cat with its fur stroked the wrong way in a thunderstorm. Moreover, her heart sang out joyfully that he evidently could not bear her out of his sight for a day.

"You are as cold as ice," he said, when she stooped to fold out with her finger a wrinkle in his bent neck as he leant above the foot; "put on your shoes, like a good girl, and let's be off."

"I haven't had my tea yet," she protested; "I brought everything for it, but I was too lazy to get sticks for the fire. Do let's stay here. You can go and get wood and then we shall be warm enough, if we sit close round it in this little house. Do, Roger."

So it was arranged, and they spent the next half-hour collecting withered bracken and dried heath stumps. The kettle was filled from Grim's Lake, that never dries save in extraordinary summers, and at last the fire, placed in the corner of the hut, settled into a steady glow, after the first uprush of flame from the gorse clumps they had first lit. As they ate and drank, crouching close to the fire, the wind crept round their shelter stealthily as the sun began to set. It was getting dark rapidly, for the thunder-clouds were gathering round Hameldon, though neither of them noticed it in their absorption. A nightjar purred down the valley and left the echo behind him; over the heath the curlew began to pipe, crying like a lonely child.

"This is like home," said Roger—"like our home that

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will be. How many times will you pile up the logs against my coming in out of the cold? I can see you doing it now."

There was a still undertone of feeling beneath his simple words that moved her like the knell of a passing bell.

"I'm in rather a difficulty, do you know," he said, finding her still silent; "but it's a difficulty that has always been with me, so I ought to be used to it."

"Yes?" she answered interrogatively.

"You see, each generation wants to go one better than the last, but the old one always wants to keep to its own way. And when the old have a strong grip on things, it seems cruel to shake it off with a rough hand."

"I've never known much of that," said Wilmot, trying to see his drift, "for I've hardly counted with mother, I've been so little with her; and as for Uncle Dickie, he's so keen after things, that it's I who have had to race to keep up with him."

"But with my father it is all different. You see, he's spent his life making money and adding a little bit of land to a little bit of land, sometimes buying, sometimes foreclosing a mortgage. He can't see any other way of living than that, now."

"No, after years of the same thing, of course one would find it impossible to change one's ideas. But isn't it hard to understand any one ever getting into such a rut?"

"Of course, he's made the money. And though it will be mine, it's his now. But I suppose no one, not even so far away from things as we are out here, is left just where his fathers were. You see, I'm a country man first and foremost, and I believe it's the country men who alone can help in the mess the country is in. For the squalid swelter of town can only be broken up by the country man showing that there's still food and life for thousands out here. They

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say it in towns, certainly, but they don't really know how it's to be done."

"And you want to help?" said Wilmot, leaning forward eagerly.

Here for the first time in her life was a man who talked of his plans to her as an equal; for, after all, Dickie, she told herself, was of another age, and Tony never talked to her of the real things. Somehow Roger Hannaford, though he spoke so simply of what were newspaper common-places, had an air about him of having reached his conclusions by his own unaided effort.

"I want to help," he said, with an inward brooding look; "we're in a position to do it too. We've land, a certain amount of money, and knowledge of the business. I don't say, of course, that I should choose moorland for a start; but, after all, there are advantages there you get nowhere else."

"As how?"

"Why, have you ever asked yourself the root of all this poverty over against the wealth?"

"Oh yes—capitalism," she said glibly. "Oh, I've read some political economy too."

"I've read little enough."

She had, indeed, been struck by curious gaps in his knowledge. Long ago she had summed him up: poetry, except a little school Shakespeare, nil; fiction, some Dickens; history, political, very sketchy.

"But," he went on, "there's this that I've seen of history, that the root of everything was planted long before capitalism began on any scale, and that was through the loss by the people of their common land. They talk of the cry 'Back to the land'—why, it's only giving the people what's their own—their own, till it was robbed from them. Just think of this: no poverty existing before

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enclosing began. There are more common rights, of course, hereabouts than in most places, but that's only because of the unproductiveness of the land; and even that's been pared and pared, more than anybody would guess till they went into the matter in the old records. But what am I about to be going on like this? It's only because I've never a soul here to speak to that I do it. Please forgive me."

"Oh, don't. You're treating me as I wanted to be treated—as an equal, not a fool. And you want to help bring them back to what's their own?"

"Ay, to the land. But I can't do much in my father's lifetime. It's with the greatest difficulty that I've even got him to let me have a few decent cottages, with gardens, built. And yet it's his money, and I can't jack it all up and leave him, for I've no leverage without the land and the money. And only one friend—who's now in gaol, by the way—to share the notion of what we could do here. Curious, isn't it, how most public jobs start off by the man in charge of 'em being in gaol?"

"You've got me now," she said.

Then it swept over her with a sudden flash that her help would be only hindrance, that while he was dreaming of work she was not even honest, that her false position, when it was published to his little world, would probably give the death-blow to his schemes. How could he do anything in which he needed his fellow's help, after such discredit as she would bring upon him? She remembered the night at Challacombe when she had appealed in the name of their child to the doctor's bravery. Now, it was a call to her own courage that sounded—she recognized it as such.

"Ay," he said, "thank God, and it's you who can do the most, too, for I don't in my heart of hearts think we

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can do much for this generation. It's the children that must be made to grow up into the new ways. That's where the telling part of the work comes. The children growing up in the midst of healthy surroundings, without the infernal conventions, the false idols, of the towns. Your children and mine, maybe, anyway, other folks' children, please God, learning to get their food honestly out of the earth with their own labour. That's what we'll have around us some day."

She pushed his hand away and hid her face in her hands. He smiled at the simple thought that his little woman's modesty was shamed, for reverence came naturally to his nature where she was concerned.

Then he suddenly looked round as the low growl of thunder came from the left; thunder from the left—somehow he fancied that this was, of old, counted a bad omen.

"Hullo!" he said, "we're besieged, and we must run for shelter as quickly as possible. Your coat won't bear anything. Here," he said, standing up and stripping off his overcoat for her to put it on. She resisted, but he had his way, and putting his arm under hers, he hurried her down the path to the road. But the storm was upon them; the rain came in a hissing sheet, and the rattle and roar of the thunder was straight overhead. "We must shelter till the worst's over, for we can't keep it up like this, and if we could we should be drenched in ten minutes. Here, let's try this."

A few squares of granite several hundred yards from the road marked the site of some cottages, one of which still stood, roofed, and with windows barricaded with boards, but evidently long uninhabited, for the garden and walls of it were overgrown with gigantic nettles.

Breaking down the crazy door with one blow of his foot, Roger entered the house. It was a moorman's hut,



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built of rough granite, with unplastered walls. The broken panes were filled with weed between the boards, and the room was full of the smell of damp and mould. But shelter of a kind it offered, and even such comforts as a table, for a flap projected from the wall beneath the window.

A wave of fear at the dark place seemed to rush out at Wilmot as she stood on the threshold, her skirts drawn round her, watching Roger as he piled up an armful of peat which he had found in the lean-to outhouse, and knelt to coax it into flame, with his face close to the ash-strewn hearth.

"Roger, don't let us stay here. I don't like this house. Outside is better, even in the storm."

Her voice grew shrill with fear, for she could still hear the sound of the pebble beach, where Archelaus had so knelt, when she watched Roger's attitude and his pursed-out lips.

"Nonsense, outside indeed. Just look at it," he said, rising to stretch, and pointing with a blackened hand.

But there seemed to be no outside, for the blackness shrouded everything so completely that they could scarcely see one another or the outline of the walls.

"Help me to get this thing under way," he said, "then you won't be nervous. It's got to be light and warmth to us. Thank goodness, there's plenty of wood, though it's all damp."

They knelt side by side at their task, and at last the glorious blaze filled the squalid place. Still Wilmot feared to be alone, for there were so many dark corners, where noisome reptiles might be expected. Roofed-in places are always hideous, away from constant human presence.

At last they had a solid glow that filled the room with light, and a store of peat brought in from the outhouse and heaped in the corner of the open chimney to dry. Their housekeeping became delightful at last, when Wilmot's

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picnic kettle began to sing and the remains of the food were laid out.

"A siege, indeed," said Roger, watching the banquet, and gracefully filling the teapot, "but the defenders aren't yet at the last gasp."

After their fragmentary supper Roger drew a log to the fire and spread his coat above it for a seat. The fire was scattering the mouldy smells, and Wilmot had contrived to dry their sodden coats after a fashion.

"How long is this likely to last?" she asked, leaning forward to throw back a piece of blazing wood into the heap. The moment for speech had come, but the hammering pulses in her head were making nothing but ridiculous jigs that repeated themselves with maddening persistency.

"Nobody could tell," said Roger, drawing her towards his end of the log; "it may be an hour, it may be twelve. For the mist has come on as thick as night. If I weren't afraid of your being so tired, I should bless the chance it's given us. Look at me, love, tell me. Don't you love it—this storm, and our two selves together in the centre of it? Years and years of life together and just this little foretaste where nobody can find us."

"Oh, let me go," she said, wrenching herself free. "Roger, if some one told you that I wasn't what you thought me, wasn't good, should you believe him?"

"Dearest, what is the matter with you to-night?" he said, leaning forward as he sat to hold her shaking hands.

"Answer me, Roger. What should you say?"

"I should just look in your eyes, and they'd tell me the truth. There never was a woman with such eyes as yours that *they* wouldn't tell the truth anyway."

"And yet you're looking into them now," she said bitterly. "Oh, just put aside lover's fancies. Believe me, we've got beyond all that."

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He stood up suddenly, for the air was electric.

"Wilmot, what do you want to say? I have never asked you to tell me anything, for such a question would have been an insult. A woman's life must shame a man's—a good woman's anyway. Nor have I any intention of talking about myself, for every man rises above his old self when he cares for a woman as I care for you."

"And cannot a woman rise above her old self too?"

"Surely; but what can that have to do with you? Besides, I know it all, don't I?" he said, trying to speak lightly. "Brought up by Uncle Dickie—and well brought up too. I long to tell him how well, but we'll put in a few days at Challacombe on our wedding journey. Born at Bossiney, or was it Bottreaux, North Coast? By the way, you must have seen my cousin Archelaus Rouncevell. Poor chap, he came a cropper over some woman. A wretched story altogether."

"Archelaus—Archelaus Rouncevell?"

She pulled herself from his grasp and leant, like one in pain, over the flap where they had so happily stood and feasted.

"My God, it's the writing on the wall. Archelaus Rouncevell your cousin."

"Wilmot, Wilmot, what is it? What is Archelaus Rouncevell to you?"

"I—I—cannot you guess?" Her face seemed shrunken, so that he thought, even in his perplexity, that at ninety this was what she would look like.

He shook himself savagely, then laughed. "But we're both mad. The woman was married."

"I was the woman."

There was a dead silence, till a twig snapped in the fire.

"But she was a married woman," he repeated stupidly.

"I've been married." She stood tracing with her fingers the circles left on the unwashed table by cider-mugs.

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"But he's dead? Your husband is dead?"

"No; he's living."

To answer in a catechism was easy enough now. She said the responses as lightly as a Sunday-school child.

"But you did not care for him?"

"No, I suppose not."

"But you never lived with him?"

"Our child died last summer."

"With a man you didn't love. But it can't be true. It's impossible. Wilmot, say it isn't true."

"It is quite true," she repeated sullenly. Would the man ask her next for proofs of what she asserted?

All life seemed to have been wiped from his face, as he pressed heavily on her shoulders, standing over her at his full height.

"Oh, what a fool I've been," he said. "I wondered how you would bear with a big rough fellow like me, how you'd face marriage—you that seemed a thing for a man to touch with cold fingers, not hot lips; you that have lived with a man you didn't love. Did you ever love any one? I should like to know that."

"You know," she said, with white lips.

"I know! I know nothing. I'm a blind fool. Did you ever care one little straw, the paring of your nail, for me?"

"You know," she repeated with lips that moved though no sound came.

"How can I know if you speak the truth? But what's the difference now?"

"You said—you said that a woman could—rise above what she'd done, like a man."

"I never said she'd be the same woman, did I?" he sneered.

Lifting her roughly, he passed his hands over her face and hair; then spanned, with finger and thumb, her slender

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neck. It was a moment of exultation, for a wild sense of power possessed him : at any rate, she was at his mercy.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered.

"Kill you, I think. But you're hardly worth being hanged for, after all."

The peasant in him was uppermost now. He forgot everything in the sense of strength, no longer kept down by reverence and respect. Worthless, yet desirable, and in his power : it was enough. Then he pushed her away and stood leaning on the mantelpiece with his face on his hands.

"And I thought you were shy of me, poor fool that I was. I thought you would rather be alone to-night. You, for what are you, after all?"

"Whatever I may be, Roger, you——"

"I am no better than other men."

"I thought you so," she said quietly. "I told you the truth to-night because I thought you trusted me, respected me, loved me as no one else has ever done. Do you think I am a stone to listen unmoved when you talk of a future that cannot be, because of what I've done? To-day when you talked of what you wanted to do I saw how I should spoil all your plans, instead of helping them."

But he was not listening, and, looking into his face, she knew why ; not till that moment had she realized what are the depths of this world's hell, for we never reach the true perception of our own sin till we see it reflected in another face.

"The future," he laughed ; "the present is enough for me. We've got to-night. I suppose that was what you wanted to let me know. I don't think we'll bother about any future just now."

With a piercing dart of revelation he was suddenly to her a strange man whom she hated, and had never known. Under provocation, contempt, trust or distrust, Dr. Borlace

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had never once lowered her in her own eyes: he had suddenly become a tower of refuge to his wife. The next second she condemned her thought, for was not the man before her just her own handiwork, which she dared not recognize or acknowledge as hers?

"But you must think of the future," she said quietly, pressing her hand on his breast. "If you owe me nothing, no respect, no kindness, don't you owe her something, at any rate?"

"I can think of nothing but you," he said hoarsely. "Of what her?"

"The woman who will wait some day in the firelight for you, as you said I should. Treat me now so that the memory of me shan't shame you both."

"Say it isn't true," he whispered once more.

"I can't," she moaned.

So they held one another for a moment.

Then he put her down and left the hut. Once alone, she lay down before the fire with her head against the log. A few moments later she felt herself lifted on to a sort of couch of peat covered with a layer of straw.

"It's dry enough now," he said, with an unsteady laugh.

In the faint firelight his face was softened and changed. Like a child she slipped her arms round his neck, and then she heard him go out softly and fix the splinters of wood in the doorway.

When she awoke the mist seemed gone, and the dawn coming. In terror she bent down towards the still smouldering embers to look at her watch. What would Tryphena have been doing and thinking all these hours? Then she suddenly sprang up with a cry, for in the embers, swaying its flat head to and fro in the smouldering warmth, there lay coiled a viper. As she drew back shuddering, it hissed in fear, and wormed its way back into the crevices of the wall.

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Standing in the doorway, she watched the mist rolling away over the sodden heather and granite, and softly licking the shining wet surfaces. It was a miserable spot, for the moor had leapt the walls of the garden, and the "new-take" patches, once corn and potato ground, were rapidly reverting to their wild condition. Old pots and pans strewed the courtyard. After waiting a while in the doorway, she saw a trap approaching from the Ponsworthy direction. It was driven by Roger.

"Come," he said, reining in, "I went off for this as soon as it began to grow a bit lighter. We'll get to Uppacott, I hope, before any one is about."

"But, Roger, where did you stay last night?" she asked.

"Oh, I just walked up and down till it was time to go to Ponsworthy. I knew that if I went before the mist lifted I should have the greatest difficulty in finding the hut again. I all but lost it once or twice even as it was, by just walking a few hundred yards from it. The mist was thick enough to cut with a knife."

Suddenly she told him of the snake she had found sleeping by the hearth.

"Like enough, the poor devil thought our fire was the sunshine. There are often 'long cripples' in the walls of these old houses."

"And we, too, thought the fire we had lit was the sunshine," she said sadly, as they drove on side by side.

"Ay," he said, with a bitter smile, "if I'd chanced to lose my way and come in to make up your fire last night, I should have found you had a guardian right enough."

"How dare he speak so?" she said to herself, clenching her hands tightly and withdrawing herself into the smallest compass. Chivalry and brutality taken in turn make a bewildering alternation.

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"Who was the man?" he asked suddenly.

She told him, and they drove on in silence.

Roger's tired brain felt as though it were struggling against a foamy sea of cobwebs, that closed upon him in stifling gossamer folds again and again as he forced his way through it. The sea was endless; yielding wave after yielding wave came flowing in on him as he pushed on through it to the unknown goal. He realized at length that he had known nothing of the undertaking to which he had put his hand—the mastery of this woman's nature. What had seemed the simplest attraction in the world, that of woman to man for the age-long purposes of nature, had revealed the infinite complexity of a soul that beats its way upward by some strange inward law, from the depths of evil. For it was struggle upward, as he recognized after the first sense of repulsion. Yet his chief sensation was irritation that the quiet of his life should have been broken up like this, that the world in her should have provoked the flesh in him; he began to think, seeing the two in juxtaposition, that the devil could not be far off.

Nor was he very wrong. For as they were nearing Uppacott, and Roger was beginning to think their night's adventure was to remain unknown, they turned a sharp corner, almost knocking down some one coming in the opposite direction. It was a thin, ferret-faced man, who peered curiously at both the occupants of the dogcart. With a tightening of his lips Roger recognized him at once as Nosworthy of Corndonford, whose farm was heavily mortgaged to the Hannafords.

On the return drive, the fellow was still loitering on the road, as Roger had somehow half expected him to do, for he could not believe that this night of vexations and scenes was ever coming to an end.

"A word with you, sir," said he, coming up to the trap



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and half catching the reins. A dull anger was rising in Roger that made him grasp his whip handle tighter as he reined in: the fellow's broken teeth and nose, and red-rimmed, unwholesome eyes were an offence in the clearness of the dawn. "It's about the interest on that mortgage," he said, holding the reins, as if he feared the younger man would drive on.

"Well?"

"I'm behindhand, I know, but I want time. It'll all be paid, but I can't do it without I'm given the time. And I can't pay a stiver this quarter."

"That's my father's business, Nosworthy."

"Ay, but I think it's yours too, Master Roger. I think you'll have to make it your business, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or a certain young lady's name——"

But the sentence was never finished, for straight and clean between the eyes a blow from Roger's fist sent him spinning across the road.

The next instant, as he drove on, Roger felt his blood flow smoothly once more, the oppression of doubt was gone with the joy of straight acting. Repulsion and irritation had both vanished in the clearing of the brain that came with generous impulse. So if the slightest rumour against Wilmot was to spread, as it would now, thanks to his hastiness, the only way out of it was to take a bold front. Let the world talk; the more obstacles they put in his way, the clearer grew the road for him. There would be a nine days' wonder, and then peace. If need be, and if old Mr. Hannaford took things too much to heart, there were other places for Wilmot and himself besides this parish. In short, the world and the flesh were so disconcerting that the devil, in the shape of broken-nosed Sam Nosworthy, was hailed quite cheerfully.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE LONELY HEIGHTS

"'Tis day o' judgment-like, that's what it is, having dealings with the womenfolk in the courting way," said the moon-faced man in the corner. Four or five jersey-clad figures, each with a proboscis in the shape of a clay pipe, sat on a bench outside the Ring o' Bells at Challacombe. The inn, kept by Onesimus Bartlett, abuts on the quay, and is licensed to sell beer, ales, and tobacco, to be consumed on the premises.

The attention of the company being thus turned to the moon-faced man, he tried to look unconscious, but failed signally.

"So you've been trying it," said Onesimus from the doorway. "Did 'ee make much of it?"

"Her only ups and says, 'Get out, you girt Sammy,'" said the victim, smiling beamingly.

"Ah, poor sonny," said Onesimus, a man all carbuncles as to face, with a white monkey-fringe round it, "it takes a man with a head to get the better of they trade, and Dick, he never had much of a headpiece."

"And there's three of 'em after me now," groaned William, Captain Penrice's factotum, "though not in the way of courting, thanks be, now that Kate's tied up to me. There's master's new missus and missus's echo, her maid Liza, and down home along there's Kate, my missus. But I could ha' bore up if 'twasn't for they beggaring varmint o' caterpillars."

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"Caterpillars," said Prowse, the jobbing gardener, "'tis early for they."

"Early or late, there they be in every bit of green stuff I boil for the cap'n and Miss Penaluna, or rather Mrs. Penrice, to call her what she lawful is. There was Miss Pen's Liza was to do the housework, and I was to cook for 'em. Well, says I, that seems reasonable enough: man in the galley, maid upon deck. But they hadn't been back a week but what missus says I am poisoning of 'em. What's a caterpillar or two, I should like to know, in a boil of cabbage? They'm mostly cabbage theirselves. Why, the cap'n must ha' swallowed scores of 'em afore he took up with Miss Pen and never so much as winked."

William evidently put a low estimate on his own cooking methods.

"And when I get home after a day of it with missus, there's Kate waiting for me, all upon wires like an apple-drane (wasp) in a bottle."

"Kate always was a vinegar-bottle," said Prowse, frankly.

"So her was," said William, mournfully; "but come to that, they'm all alike in their innerds. Scratch any of 'em and you come upon the same old woman underneath."

"Iss fay," said a mariner, looking seaward with a wink, "but they'm not all the same make outside."

Kate's beauty was not altogether to the taste of Challacombe, otherwise she would probably never have consented to become Mrs. William.

"But whatever made 'ee take to such a line o' life as messing round with saucepans and that trade?"

"Cook's mate," said William, tersely, "as boy; coffinship; swim for my life. That sort o' thing. Thought I'd had enough of the sea after that, so I took up with the cap'n when he wanted a man to do for 'en."

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"But you've been a zany, I reckon, ever since they carried 'ee up to church-vamp (front) and born to be put upon by the women," said Onesimus, whose line was frankness.

"Goo-o-o-d Lord," said Prowse, "however do 'ee bear it?"

"How does a man in ginerall bear all he's got to go through afore he's cold meat?" retorted William. "And there's summat to go through too, most times, whether 'tis maids or chillern or boats or tetties."

"And you never said a truer word than that, Willyum," chanted the company, like a low-spirited Greek chorus.

"Old doctor's had a deal to go through," said Prowse.

"And sarve 'en right too," said Onesimus; "here's my water-rate up double what 'twas afore he come."

"Ay, I thought the beer was a trifle weakish," said a would-be wit.

"Well, I dunno so much about that," said Prowse, "he's had hold of the wrong end of the stick down here, sure enough, but a well-meaning man in the main 'tis, too. I be sorry to see the last of 'en, I tell 'ee, souls."

"And so be I," said the chorus.

"His physic," said the moon-faced man, "isn't rousing enough, by what I hear tell. 'Tis weakish, mostly, but I dunno that it'll do 'ee any harm, as the rat said when he saw the cat eating the poison that was laid for him."

"And if an old bed-lier or two died sudden when doctor wasn't in the way, I'll warrant they had sent for him ten times before for a toe-ache and didn't die, when he was there. What's an old bed-lier or two to make a fuss about?" said Prowse, in a generous spirit.

"And now he's going downhill fast, they say—cards and whisky, and never about by daytime. 'Tis the women between 'em that's cooked his goose for him," said William, returning to the theme of Eve in the true Edenic fashion.

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"Ay," said Prowse, "'tis like the boy who come tearing into a farm up to Dartymoor. 'Rin, rin,' says he, 'bring ropes, father's in the bog.' 'How far's a in, boy?' saith the farmer. 'Up to his ankles,' saith the boy. 'Ropes,' saith the farmer, 'you don't want no ropes. Why don't he step out?' 'But he's falled in head-foremost,' saith the boy."

"Ay, that's of it. Head-foremost in the mire. And 'tishn't ropes that'll bring 'en out," said Onesimus, "though I reckon old Cap'n Penrice 'll have a try at it now he's back from gallivanting. Missus Penrice is dressed up to the nines too," he finished, with a lack of sequence usually supposed to be exclusively feminine.

"But goes about the house in an old dandy-go-russet that I wouldn't put 'pon a scarecrow," said William, with balefully gleaming eyes.

"'Tis for fear her should step upon a caterpillar, my buck, that's what 'tis," said Prowse.

Late that night the doctor drew aside the curtains of the consulting-room to look out at the night. Only a lamp-lit circle could be seen behind him shining on a green table covered with cards. At the end of the dining-room table stood a spirit-stand and a soda-water syphon. Johanna pushed back her chair into the dimness as the doctor rose, for some tension seemed to have snapped in both as he flung down the cards. The act had, indeed, marked the last flicker of mental struggle, for he had been playing mechanically for hours, and now even sufficient force to play thus was gone. The energy which is the driving-force of self-respect, always harder to maintain in the head than the hand worker, had run down.

The intense night stillness, the quiet of a sleeping town, far more impressive than country stillness, reigned outside, and the crescent moon showed between the window-curtains. Just these two, it seemed, awake in all Challacombe, the

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Challacombe that would soon be nothing worse to him than an evil memory. And to her?

She could not tell, for the taste of Challacombe was to her too bitter-sweet for such decision. At last Dr. Borlace turned and deliberately lifted the yellow shade from the lamp; she remembered with a stab of pain how his wife had laughed at the garish colour of it when he brought it home in triumph. The doctor had quite forgotten the incident, as he stood for a second looking at her with a sardonic, half-secret smile, under which she moved restlessly.

In that moment Johanna put forth all her power: under the strain of the will-force she exercised, the coronet of plaited hair that encircled her head, the smooth polish of ivory skin, the flash of black-browed eyes, seemed to sparkle with life, the fibrous hairs at her temples threw soft shadows of bloom.

Then a great fear came, that most paralyzing power of all the powers within, a doubt of her own purposes, though the moment had now come for which she had agonized, praying often in the old barbarous and blasphemous fashion, with promises of willing endurance of all kinds of suffering if so be she might gain her end.

"Well, Johanna," said Dr. Borlace, with his eye-corner wrinkles in full play, "only another ten days or so, I suppose, and then good-bye."

The furniture was already numbered for the sale, the very armchair in which he had been sitting was numbered Lot 367.

"It's good-bye to Challacombe and it's good-bye to you, I suppose. You're the last thing left, now that we haven't even got Diogenes. But he went long ago. Good Lord, it's been a time and a half. But Challacombe's cleaner, and they've got their water-supply over my body, so to speak. A drinking fountain set up to me would

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be a suitable memorial, don't you think? 'The Borlace Memorial' sounds well, doesn't it? Come, come," he said, seeing her face for a second as she moved restlessly, "don't look so dismal, old Johanna; if I haven't done so much as I meant to here, that's always the lot of us poor mortals. Not that I've done much, Heaven knows."

"No, no, no," said Johanna, the words coming as if a dam had broken; "never say you've done little. There's always my cheeld and me."

"Always me," he laughed. "Good old Johanna," he said, slipping his hand under her chin and holding her face to the light. "My heavens, Johanna," he said in a low voice, "what a splendid woman you are to-night!"

In the space of a heart-beat she lifted her face to his, and saw there what she had worked for, and now knew she dreaded to see.

"Shall we stick together still, old woman?" he said. "Will you come away with me where nobody will know or care what we do? I can't offer you much, but such as it is, it's yours for the taking. And," he finished, his voice rasping dryly in a changed tone, "you'll at least have the consolation of knowing that you don't injure anybody else by taking their leavings."

She understood, for there was nothing to-night she could not read easily, and rose to her feet, away from the lamp-lit circle and his eyes. She moved laboriously, as if mortally tired, or suddenly aged. Her face flamed scarlet as she suddenly remembered what she had seen in this very room: a woman in a rocking-chair, singing to a night-dressed baby. She could see the downy head against the woman's shoulder and the bare toes pressing on her palm. It was a tiny woman who rocked and crooned in the firelight that flashed on the doctor's face, as he watched the pair with a look of peace on his grey face.

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She knew her own thought as one knows the truths one would fain gainsay, did one dare. "He'll never look at me like that," she thought; "only at me with that other look, that hateful look which is all that women like me can raise in a man's face."

In a moment her little triumph of to-night was poisoned, for she reached at one leap the depths of woman's debasement, the punishment that waits for her who has misused divine gifts.

"And yet I could give 'em what he loves too—chillern," she whispered into her bent arms as she leant against the mantelpiece, "not like that little blind baby that was all she could compass."

To the doctor the thing was becoming a curious experiment which he had begun idly, but now felt to be worth watching.

"Come, now," he said, rising, "let's hear your answer. Come or not, which is it to be? I don't offer you any high falutin. 'Tisn't in me to offer it, and I don't say it'll last; but, you know me, I'll treat you as fairly as you could expect. I'm a bit brutal, maybe, but you know that's the worst of me, the very worst. There's nothing behind that for you to find out. Will you come with me out of this hole, where we'll not be watched and pried after?"

"No, no, no," she cried, stamping her foot. "I'll not, I'll not. 'Till to-night, 'twas what I tried for, and now I can't do it. I couldn't if I tried ever so. Oh," she went on passionately, "it's not that I care what becomes of me. It's that you should have said it. Yes, that you should ha' said it."

"But, my good woman, don't be a fool. You say it's just what you've been planning. Why complain, then?"

"Oh, I know that, but it was you that ought to have



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known me better. I've watched 'ee, ay, loved 'ee too, thank God. But I'll never do what you ask me. Never."

"Why?"

"Because I know well enough how you told lies to please her, would have coined your last good word with lies for her to trample on. You poisoned all the fools in Challacombe to please her. And I say you did right. I commend 'ee for it. That's the way to do when you've got your heart-strings wound round a body. I'd ha' done that and more for you any day."

The doctor laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "And yet your scruples won't let you come with me. You've become very squeamish of late."

"It wanted but that you should sneer like that."

"Oh, hang it. I didn't mean that, but you work upon a man so. Give me a plain yes or no. Will you come and share—what there is to share—with me?"

"No," said Johanna, "no. That's my answer."

"But, my dear soul, if it's religious scruples that you're worrying about, you needn't, I can assure you. For no sane person worries about all that now. As for the law they prate about, and the tables of stone of the commandments that fell down from heaven and all the rest of it, it's nothing but a candle that man lit for himself to see his way through a precious dark world. He lit it himself, that old candle called 'Thou shalt not,' and it's guttered out, or blown out, by now."

"All the more need, then," said Johanna, with a glance at the guttering flame of the lamp, "all the more need to keep a clear light inside you, if that'll all you've got to go by and the candle's gone out. For if it's all lies they tell us in church, that's no matter to what I know—that it isn't in me to drag you down, lower than you've gone yet, you that I'd fair die for. For it would be dragging 'ee lower

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than you've ever gone yet. Ay, and lower than I've ever gone yet either. For she's still all you want, body and soul of her. And I'm naught to 'ee save what I've been to others."

She laid her heaving shoulders across the table with its litter of cards and money. The doctor stood for a second looking at her.

"No," he said, half to himself, "you're right. I haven't failed altogether."

He closed the door softly behind him, and she heard him go heavily across the hall into Wilmot's den. Step by step he was leaving her life. It was to her the moment of fever that comes with the wound of battle, for the stings of longing wait for the moment that comes—after, when the long march stretches ahead into the dim darkness, so far that the waters of the river of death cannot be even faintly heard by the straining ears.

At last she lifted herself from the table, and began to gather the scattered coins into little heaps, dividing the one or two sovereigns from the silver and pence. Then she unfastened the bodice of her dress and took out a little green linen bag that she wore there. It contained all that she had won from the doctor during the weeks they had played together. The gold offered no temptation, but the pence and silver; there seemed so much of it—and there was the child. For a long time she held a handful of silver, thinking how much it would do. Besides, was not some of it legally hers, for certain weeks' wages still left unpaid? At last she swept it all into a heap, fetched paper and string from the kitchen, wrapped the whole sum up anyhow and directed it to Dr. Borlace. Then she went upstairs to her room.

Half an hour later she came into the dark consulting-room, holding up the candle steadily, like a Caryatid, as

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she looked round the room. She was wrapped in a grey shawl and wore a hat. A lame dog that the doctor had been curing dragged itself forward to lick her left hand. She noticed that the doctor had fetched a plate of scraps for the poor waif, and wondered, in an agony of self-pity, that he should care for everything in the world except for her. "And yet," she said to herself, "I've never wanted anything so much as to feel his arms round me—me, first of all in all the world, and I match him too," she went on, stretching out her arms in front of her, "better than a weak little toad like that one. I wish he'd beat me, fair leather me, like father used to do. I'd rather far he'd do that than put me away all cold-like."

She began to wrench the shawl as it clung round her, but she mastered herself at last, and, opening the front-door softly, went out into the street. There she stood for a moment, looking up and down the deserted place, where the lamps flickered cheerlessly in the wind. There were no other lights to be seen, except a faint gleam of lamplight behind the Venetian blinds of Captain Penrice's sitting-room and the light from Wilmot's room downstairs, where the doctor was still sitting.

Struck by a sudden thought, she slipped across the road and knocked softly on the window of the captain's room. He would be sitting there alone, she hoped, and surely he might be able to advise her what was to be done. After an eternity of waiting, he came to the door to look out.

"Let me come in," whispered Johanna, "I must speak to you."

She thought he hesitated a moment in the hall, but finally he led her into the sitting-room, where she saw the cause of his hesitation, for Mrs. Penrice stood by the table looking startled. As the clock on the mantelpiece showed, it was long past midnight.

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"Johanna," said the captain, sternly, "what's it all about, and why are you wandering about at night like this?"

"Oh, I'm going off of my own free will," she said, rage at the universe in general possessing her. "I've not been turned out, as you seem to think. I'm going to put an end to all this, for it's gone on long enough. Here you've been leaving Challacombe and him, just when you was most wanted, and when things have tied themselves into a knot, you want to know what it's all about. This is what it's all about. I'm cloam, and she's fine china, so I can't do her work any longer. I'm going to fetch back his wife, that's what I'm going to do. What you ought to have done months ago."

"You're meddling with what you don't understand," said the captain, looking at his wife. "Dorothy, I don't think there's any call for you to stay up any longer. You can't do any good here."

"Oh, you needn't send her away, because I'm not to breathe the same air with her. I only come now to ask you to step across. I'm all tore to bits inside me, and I don't know what's happening to the doctor. You go across to 'en and see if he's all right."

"What's been happening? And why are you dressed for going away?"

"I told you," she repeated sullenly, "I'm going to her. She ought to be back here."

"But why go now?" shrugged the captain.

"I was going in the morning. I'll walk the streets till the first train goes out. Here you've lived to be an old man, and don't know yet that sometimes the only way to save yourself is to run."

The captain hesitated, then turned his back on her: for once his charity had failed him. What the devil had everybody been about, he asked himself, while he had been away, to get things into this mess?

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But his wife understood far better.

"No, no," she said, crossing the room, and laying a hand on Johanna's arm, "you'll stay here till it's time for the train. Richard," she said, looking at the captain imperatively, "we'll not let her go. For I understand, if you don't."

"No," said Johanna, drawing back, "I couldn't stay here. He wouldn't want me," she nodded to Captain Penrice, who, with shoulders hunched to his ears, watched them both from the hearthrug.

"He doesn't understand, but I do," said Mrs. Penrice, putting things, for the first time since her acquaintance with the captain, entirely out of his jurisdiction. "You came away to-night, because you wouldn't harm the doctor, for you care for him too much. Isn't that it, Johanna?"

"And," said Johanna, looking awe-stricken, "I thought you were a hard old cat, without a bit o' nature to the make of 'ee."

"Perhaps I was once, Johanna," laughed Mrs. Penrice, "but he's taught me better," she finished, pointing to the astonished captain, "for all he's so dull to-night. Come," she said, "you shall have the spare-room, and I shall lock you in. Then we'll get you away in the morning before the girl is about. Nobody will be a pin the wiser, and," she said with authority, "Richard, you'll just step across and see the doctor."

"Well, of all the astonishing——" began the captain, but his wife quietly shut the sitting-room door behind her and left him. He had come to the amazement of the marriage service.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### AT THE HANDS OF THE MAGDALEN

OVER Uppacott that same evening the moon in its first quarter gleamed gold-red through the light mists like a window-slit into the realm of light beyond; one star, green beside the ruddy sickle, watched above the tree-tops; in the distance the roar of the Dart was the only evidence of life. The air seemed asleep, held in suspension, waiting for the order which should call its forces into array for the next act in the elemental conflict, as Wilmot walked up and down by the gorge opposite Benjie Tor watching the wide-flung light fade into mist, the mist into starlight.

The watching star and the golden sickle grew clearer as her inward conflict emerged into plainer consciousness. It was by this time the old problem in a fresh form: out of all the universe, she asked herself again, does man alone fight his battle unaided, without help from any outside power?

All nature seems double: the moon and the star, the man and the woman, no lonely thing in all the world, nothing that rests on naught but its own strength—save the race of man. Help comes to him often, it is true, in strange unknown ways, air-borne, it seems, from other human souls, from the so-called dead maybe. And yet is there nothing outside man, higher, because all-knowing, to answer to his call in need? Wilmot asked the old question, pondering certain books she had read under Dr. Borlace's influence, the last word of destructive criticism, that traces the idea of the divine to no answering reality outside humanity, but to

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humanity itself; that sees the Christ as man's work. She saw the comfort in this too, as a strong soul must; saw that the race who created the divine ideal, from the first primitive fancies of the nature stories to the last splendid touch in the white glory of the Christ figure, must be itself divine.

And yet alone. In her need she called out to something to strengthen, to something that knew not man's purblind groping nor his long agony of deadly fight. For it was not enough to feel herself part of the creative race that has evolved the divine; to know that by myriad struggles such as hers the splendid fabric has been reared; to know that her failure now would be a throw-back, however small, in the long upward climb. The strength within herself had fallen too low, when the hot pulses beat through her as they did now. For, indeed, had she ever done anything but fail? Was there one single bright memory of victory?

Driven out of the world where the anodyne of work stills the senses and calms the nerves, here, it seemed, was offered her, at the cost of a mere conventionality, the absorption that would satisfy. True, it was only that Roger's hands were not just like other men's hands to her, it was only that the sight of him made her nature one with the song of the thrush from the copse; much of the character underneath was mysterious, possibly in the near future abhorrent: yet how many wives would think of such a fact? Above all, whom would she injure by giving way to her nature, even supposing that the claims of others must be considered? Tony would care less for what happened to her than he had for the fate of Diogenes: it was only the affront of insulted masculinity, at the worst, that he would feel.

By this time the mists had been chased away by the wind, and the watching star had dozens of companions. The wind was changing and the roar of the river sounded nearer. She walked higher up on the slopes of Mel Tor till there

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seemed in all the world but the vault with the star-shine above and the depths of the unknown sea that girdles all the world below; nothing but the void of the unknown future and the unfathomable past of the strange human race. And between the two no answering help to the hot blood whose heat turned her white face crimson. The twinkling lights that spoke to man of intelligences, planetary and angelic, watching over man and his destiny, the "seven planets and the nine orders of angels," were all there in visible form as glorious as when the first men dreamt the legends of the existences behind them—glorious, yet helpless, blind, unseeing, and careless in a black void. Trouble had awakened in Wilmot her inheritance of fatalism. She had been born to live thought-free, like the bee that toils, instinct-driven, through the sunny hours, because it obeys the dictates of its nature. There ought to have been "no clock in the forest" to register for her the pain and folly, the why and the whither of human action, for now she came upon the substratum of half-sanity within her.

Out of the many past lives that live again in all of us, it is only circumstance that can call any one of them into being. A smug chapel-goer can carry the hate of Cain about him for a lifetime, and remain unconscious of it to the end, for the narrow path of daily monotony has made of him a mere burden-bearing animal, and so the Cain bequeathed him by some bygone ancestor still sleeps. Thus fatalism, that belief in an unknown force, God-born or devil-born, which countless generations had bequeathed to her, began to ride in on her mind like a tide that she had no power to stem. The wind that blew back the hair from her forehead, the very rustle of the leaves seemed full of the stirring of the dead. Wilmot's father had taught her that those who die at sea come back to the earth on the anniversary of their death.



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World-old Phœnician, Jew, British chief or Methodist sailor, they had all lived on this land between the two seas, and had all acknowledged the fate that takes choice out of a man's hand. Clearer grew the sky, denser became the twilight of half-sanity in Wilmot, as she watched it changing.

Over the clear sky an edge of light cloud came up, driven by the wind; as she watched it draw onwards to the golden bow of the moon, she decided that, if it covered the moon, she would go with Roger. Slowly, like a shadowy hand, the cloud crept on and the light went out, as she had felt it would when she put her fatalism to the test.

So the moon played the part of the *Sortes Virgilianæ*, and the prayer to the something outside fell unanswered, like the touch of living hands on a lifeless breast. Again and again that night she slept and woke to feel Roger's presence all round her; to feel his kisses, dream-kisses, like all those that come in sleep, full of the longing that the mind conceals in waking moments. Depths above of the race ideal, depths behind of the race fight partly won, neither had brought help. In a few days she and Roger would be hurrying away—to the South, she hoped, where the sun would put to flight the dim visions of the black rocks of the North, buttressing the blue-grey iridescence of the Atlantic, and of the stern granite hills of the moor, the background of struggle and failure.

Early in the forenoon next day, Tryphena drove off to Ashbourne market, leaving Wilmot and Heber in charge. Soon after the midday meal, when Wilmot had gone upstairs to her room, she heard Heber calling to her from the doorway.

"A young woman, missie, asking for you," said he, jerking a thumb backwards towards the porch. With an exclamation Wilmot hurried out, and drew Johanna into the house.

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The two women eyed each other curiously for a second or two, while Wilmot's colour flickered and faded alternately. Johanna's first impressions of Wilmot, at the moment, were concerned, not with her colour, but with her clothes, especially with the seams. Mrs. Borlace's clothes, it appeared to her, must be seamless, they fitted in such skin-tight fashion: her own clothes seemed in comparison to be all seams. She felt, too, the mud-bespattered condition of her boots, for Mrs. Penrice had not ventured to give her boots to be cleaned to the maid, and Johanna had not ventured on an outlay of twopence to get them cleaned as she passed through Ashbourne. Yesterday's mud was covered, too, with the dust of the eight miles she had walked from the station. Instead of thinking of what she had come to say, she tried to hide her ugly shoes and to smooth her roughly knotted hair.

"Johanna," said Wilmot at last, "whatever has brought you here? Is anything the matter? Are you come straight from Challacombe?"

"I've come straight," said Johanna, roughly. There was a sort of mist before her eyes, and everything she had come to say was forgotten.

"I thought everybody in Challacombe had forgotten me," said Wilmot, tremulously.

"I've not left Dr. Tony alone, though he didn't know I was going. I sent a girl over to Dashpers, and she'd do for him, get his breakfast and that. She *could* do that."

Wilmot understood that this must be meant as a reproach to herself, for she had not been so considerate. It began to dawn on her that this visit was dictated by malevolence. Surely, too, it had not been usual for Johanna to call the doctor "Dr. Tony" in the old days. Then with a sudden pang she remembered that many things must have changed during her absence. It seemed

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strange to herself that the fact could hurt her, but she was obliged to confess that it did.

"Then Dr. Tony did not send you?" she said at last.

"Send me—to see you! My word, I should say he didn't."

Johanna forgot the muddy shoes, and thrust them forward boldly.

"Then you came of your own accord. Why?"

"That's my business. But you'll soon find out."

"I shall certainly make it my business to do so."

But Johanna, not paying the faintest heed to her tone of resentment, rested her head on her hands, as she leant forward to gaze into the fire.

"I suppose you've heard how they've had the lead-poisoning to Challacombe," she said meditatively, wondering, as she did so, how she was to get to the point of her visit; "but they wouldn't have known the truth to this day, and the doctor might have kept his place, if he'd held his tongue. I saw 'em when he come out of the surgery, after Tom Oldreive had showed the doctors his hand, all dropt same as if the muscles had rotted. And the doctor walked like an old man, for he thought how he'd done it all and more besides, aches and pains that wasn't rheumatics. And all, as I always said, because the sluts wouldn't turn the tap a bit afore they filled the kettle."

Wilnot frowned at the reopening of all this ancient history.

"Well," she said impatiently, "he did what he could to put it right."

"Told 'em to their faces," said Johanna, triumphantly, "said how he'd sold the people for a bit of popularity, and how the Council had done it on the cheap. And told 'em they must have iron pipes."

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"After he'd put health pipes to his own house," interpolated Wilmot.

"And to the workhouse too," said Johanna, fiercely; "and if he did put health pipes to his own house, it wasn't for his own self. But he told 'em what he thought. It's all there," she said, slapping her hand on a roll of papers she had flung on the table.

"But I didn't come to say this only," she said, her voice tailing off into a whisper.

"See," said Wilmot, leaning forward and touching her hand, "did you have any lunch? You're very tired if you've walked from Ashbourne."

She too wanted to put off the moment she dreaded, for she knew there was something behind all this.

"Yes, I'm tired," said Johanna, without moving, "but I'd a cup of tea afore I started to walk."

"Then you must have something to eat," said Wilmot, decidedly. "Come upstairs and take off your hat while I put the kettle on to boil."

"I didn't think you'd be like this," blurted out Johanna, standing up, like a child who has been naughty.

"Why, how should I be?" said Wilmot, lightly. "Shall it be tea or coffee?"

"I've never got myself to like coffee, though I do make it for the doctor."

"And does he really approve of your coffee?" asked Wilmot, resolutely keeping up her light tones as she led the way upstairs. "He never would drink mine, you know."

"He says it's not so bad for a woman."

Johanna watched while Wilmot got out towels, poured out water, and put out a fresh brush and comb.

"And now I'll see about a meal for us both," she said, bustling away, "for I ate hardly anything to-day at dinner."

Left to herself, Johanna gently touched the bottles on

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the toilet-table, she even took the stopper out of a scent-bottle. Then she desisted, for the scent would betray to Wilmot that she had helped herself. Finally, she set about refreshing her wearied face and arranging her disorderly hair.

When she returned to the sitting-room, the objectionable shoes were removed, and she walked in her stockinged feet, so that Wilmot remarked the lithe freedom of her movements. She made no effort to conceal the tired lines of her face, and ate her egg with the simplicity of a chidden child.

When the meal was over, they sat down near the window, where they could watch the garden plants beaten down by the flying scuds of rain.

"Why did you really come? For you thought I knew all this," said Wilmot, tapping the papers that lay on the table. "Besides, why should you come to tell me this, anyway?"

The woman was silent.

"Why was it?" said Wilmot, softly.

"I don't think I rightly knowed why it was, till you come downstairs," said Johanna, slowly, "and I saw you again."

"Why was it?" repeated Wilmot again.

"I don't want to say it now."

"But you must. I know, it was because you hated me."

"Well, yes, I believe it was."

"And you don't hate me now?"

"Yes, I do," said Johanna, starting up, "and I wish I hadn't ate your meal."

"Sit down again," said Wilmot, laughing, "never mind about the meal. You're all the better for it, and so am I. Tell me what you had in the back of your mind when you left Challacombe and started off to me. Was it only because you were sorry for him?"

"I wanted you to suffer like what him and me was

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suffering. I thought, 'She shan't stay away and be happy.' I'll make her feel too."

"Why were you suffering?"

"Well, since you will have it, because I'd got to care for 'en. Oh yes, I oughtn't to feel like that. I'm no lady to feel it."

"Perhaps it will surprise you if I tell you that I knew it before. Anyway, I had no such thought as you attribute to me."

"Oh yes, you had. But he hadn't, and he never looked at a body like some do, as if a working girl wasn't of the same flesh and blood as others. And he'd do as much for the poor as for the rich any day."

"I know it."

"And he was miserable, and he'd call me up and we'd play cards, night after night, to make 'en forget. And I won and won, but 'twas all better than whisky, which it would have been if it hadn't been for the cards. And so we played."

Wilmot moved hastily.

"Oh yes, it's low, for the likes of you that wouldn't touch 'en with your little finger. And then, when he had to leave Challacombe, and there was going to be a sale, he asked me to go with 'en."

"And so that's what you came to tell me?" said Wilmot, drawing a long breath.

"Iss, I did. For, thought I, that'll touch her on the raw if she's a woman at all. For every woman's a dog-in-the-manger down to bottom."

"But didn't it occur to you that I might try to prevent this plan of yours, if you came to me with the story?"

"Iss, it did; but don't you see that that would only matter to me if I meant to go with 'en."

"And don't you mean to go?"

"I shouldn't have come to you if I had."

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"And yet you care for him?"

"And that's just why I wouldn't go with 'en. See here, you know what I've been, and maybe it's because I've been what I have that I know—what I do. I've seen the look that comes over a man's face when he's done with 'ee—when he tosses 'ee aside same as if 'twas a sucked gooseberry skin. And I wouldn't see that look on the doctor's face, not for all heaven. He's never looked like that at a woman yet, but he would have at me in a month or two. And that's the one thing I can't bear. To drag *him* down to that level."

Wilmot thought of her search for an answering reality; amid all the whirling of the planets never the rustle of a god's wing, only far down in the human heart a faint flutter of the divine.

"I've had enough of that sort of love," went on Johanna to herself, "and if I can't have aught but that from 'en, I'll just go."

Every virtue here below throws its shadow; by the side of unselfishness lies the shadow, hypocrisy; by love, its shadow, lust; nay, even the splendid palace of truth casts the inky blackness of cruelty to its side. But sometimes when dwelling among the shadows one haps at last on the reality, indeed, may even chance to bark one's shin on it. So through the shadows of lust Johanna had come upon the reality, love. Wherefore, perchance, may be learnt something of the purposes of this world.

"But you may be mistaken," said Wilmot, tapping restlessly on the window-pane.

"But I'm not," said Johanna, standing to lean on the table as if she wanted support, "for all the best of him that he had to give he gave to you—long ago."

Wilmot laughed. "You are raving," she said contemptuously. "Please leave me out," she continued haughtily.

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"He always has cared for 'ee," said Johanna, speaking more naturally, "so that he hadn't eyes for any other body. I dunno that I should have said it if you hadn't been kind to me. Why, when he first let the Council have their way about putting in the lead pipes, it was but to get a bit of favour from you—from you, that didn't care a snap of the finger for him. For you had sneered at him for not doing things."

Was it true? Wilmot asked herself, going over the history of their life together. Could it be?

"You don't believe me," said Johanna, warming to her work. "Why, there's a shirt that you made for 'en, made worse than I make 'em too, coming to bits 'tis for the size of the stitches. But he will wear that shirt oftener than any of the comfortable ones, though it must gall him frightful, what with raw edges and that. You ain't a woman, you're a stone, or you would have known all this better than I could tell 'ee. And now I'll go."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, anywheres."

"No, no. Don't take that tone about it."

"Oh, as to that, I'm not going to throw myself away. I've heard of a place to Stoke Michael; there's a big laundry set up there for Regiswear folks. I'm going there, with the cheeld."

"And you've got money," said Wilmot.

"Money," laughed Johanna, "I've enough for my ticket. That's all."

"But you won at cards," faltered Wilmot.

"And do you think I'd touch that? I give it all back last night."

"Has he paid you your wages?"

"There's something owing."

After they had settled this, Wilmot said, "Now, you'll



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take care of what you're doing, Johanna? You'll not throw yourself away?"

"Why are you in such a taking about me?" asked Johanna, wonderingly.

"Because," said Wilmot, leaning over to speak in her ear, "I think you came in time to save me from some day seeing that look you spoke of on a man's face."

The seven planets and the nine orders of angels had resolved themselves into the figure of the Magdalen, just one of the many dusty answers given to the soul—

"When hot for certainties in this our life."

For a long time after Johanna had left, Wilmot sat with her lips drawn to a tight thread and with eyelids narrowed like snake-slits in the effort at mental compression. At last she moved, and, leaning out of the low window, listened to the wind in the branches. After the rain the air resounded with the gurgles of streamlets hurrying down to the river; the leaves, too, were wet, as brother leaf touched brother in the wind. The lap of waters and the sweeping winds sent pulses of pain through her as she saw how she had shrunk from Dr. Tony, repelled him; saw, now that the woman in her was awake, what the man in him must have had to suffer. Passionately she held herself in fancy between the doctor and the baying world that had gathered round him. Lips of her, touch of her, what had they ever been worth to any one, save to comfort?

It had come to a simple question now, which of the two men would suffer most? A much plainer issue than any talk of this commandment or that, for in that devil's wedlock of sin and pain it was now a mere matter of less or more of pain to one or other.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE END OF A DREAM

LACKING the spur of discomfort, Roger Hannaford had remained a dreamer, for whose self-satisfaction it was enough that he had once dreamt dreams and seen visions. The mere idea of bringing to a few strugglers something of the comfort, health, and peace which the elbow-room of the moor offers was such a joy to him that at last the idea of the struggle itself became a sort of pleasurable background to his visions. Without it the world would have been a distinctly poorer place to him. In this rather ghoulish attitude he by no means stood alone, for the spectacle of social misery and the discussion of the way out is to many nowadays but an ingredient of extra interest in life, always providing that they are not brought into direct personal contact with it. In this ecstatic contemplation of other folks' miseries, Roger had passed many years, with considerable satisfaction to himself, feeling fully content to wait for his own control of his father's estates in order to begin the working of his schemes of help. Meanwhile there was creeping upon him middle-age, that painful time when a man begins, perforce, to count the weaknesses of character that he has unwittingly encouraged in himself, as he reckons the physical sprains, the sprung tendons and over-taxed muscles due to youthful recklessness. Worst of all, there begin to crawl over him the dreary mists through which sounds the warning bell that rings "Cui Bono" in the ears.

Satisfied so with dreams, he had waited for the woman

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who was to share with him the long-deferred fulfilment of vision. Now it seemed that she had come, but the coming was in strange guise. For Wilmot was neither the woman of whom he had dreamt, nor did the way to win her seem possible to him in the sober light of day. She contradicted all the cherished traditions of himself and his forebears: she was wayward, freakish, showing a supreme disregard of those restrictions which the countryman holds in far greater awe than does the townsman. To juggle with the social "Thou shalt not" was to Roger the act of a light woman, yet he could not altogether so condemn her, for she was too quick in sympathy with other lives to show the self-absorption of the merely reckless.

In the upheaval of his ideas that Wilmot had wrought, it was he who ultimately felt condemned in his own eyes, he who had let "I dare not" wait upon "I would" all the days of his life. For dreams unfulfilled destroy manliness and eat away the very substance of character, till the warp and woof of a man's life fade into moth-eaten dust. To every man his visions, and according to the vision, so the man. For all men dream, only the practical man shapes his dreams in the solid stuff of fact, while the visionary is satisfied with the cloudy fancies of his soul. And, indeed, these cloudy fancies make up the man, for his thoughts are but external to him, the product of his century and nationality.

The finishing touch to this process in inward revelation was given to Roger by the interview with Nosworthy. For of what cowardliness had he not been guilty that Wilmot's name should be sullied by such lips as those? In the excess of his zeal he even lost sight of Wilmot's own share in the story, for she, at any rate, had put all to the test, to win or lose; had, in fact, done what he had never found courage to do.

Raw haste, the Nemesis of the dreamer, came upon

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him here, and he went straight to his father and told him in the plainest language how he proposed using the estates after they had passed into his hands.

"Waiting for dead men's shoes, eh?" said the old man.

"If you choose to put it so. But if I use it all to an end you would disapprove of, after all, 'tis but what nine sons out of ten do."

"Only, my boy," said Mr. Hannaford, grimly, "I'll say this for 'em, they aren't in general such fools as to saddle the horse before they've caught 'em."

"I want to play straight, that's all."

"Ye'll do it with noan of my land or money, of that you may take your davy. For I'd rather sow Ponsworthy deep in thistles than turn it into a nesting-place for wastrels. And ye'll not do it after I'm gone, either, for I'll will it all away to the John Hannafords as sure as my name's Roger Hannaford Senior."

"You'll do as you please, father," said Roger, curtly, turning on his heel.

"And Roger Hannaford Junior may sell oranges from door to door," shouted the old man after him. "But," he muttered to himself, "I'd give a crown to know what's moved him to come chattering like a jay."

That evening Mrs. Rouncevell arrived from St. Piran's, and after he had heard her story, Mr. Hannaford was able to give a shrewd guess at the cause of his son's extraordinary candour.

"So *that's* the flea that bit Roger," he observed reflectively, when he had heard her out. "But if you come in answer to my letter, why the dickens didn't you come before? Here's weeks it's been unanswered."

"I shut up St. Piran's and left no address. It was waiting for me when I got back after burying my poor sister."

"Well, you have buried her," he said, with a rub of his

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raspy chin, "and that's always a blessing, to think there's one old cat of a woman less upon earth. Oh, Lord, Lord, my dear soul, don't you go about with any false ideas. I don't. For you hate that poor little toad of a woman that's misled my son, till you can barely see out of your eyes. And if she's sinned, she'll suffer."

"And haven't I?" said Mrs. Rouncevell, fiercely. She had told the story fully, save for the omission of her own part in it—her silence to Wilmot about the escape of Archelaus from the death he had planned for himself.

"It's turned you as yellow as a guinea," said Mr. Hannaford, genially.

That afternoon Wilmot had set out for an aimless walk, in which her steps took her instinctively towards Ponsworthy. Remembering that Roger himself was away at Ashbourne market, when once in sight of the ricks and granaries of the farm, she could not resist the temptation of going in to see old Mr. Hannaford: it would be an unspoken good-bye.

On the threshold of his room she recognized Mrs. Rouncevell's voice, but it was too late to draw back then, even had pride permitted such a thing.

"So you've come," said Wilmot to her; "it was like you. I expected you long ago."

"She came to spoil my chances, I suppose," she said, turning to the old man, who watched the two from the support of his stick-handle, with his face wrinkled into innumerable creases, like the loose folds of skin on the creature called a "cockiolly bird."

"Ay," he said laconically.

"And she's done it? She's told my story?" she asked, with a rising note in her voice.

"Ay," he said again.

"Roger already knows it. I told him," said Wilmot, catching her voice with a gulp.

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"So I guessed, for he's been up here kicking over the traces like billy-oh. Told me about all his little plans for dealing with my property. But I'll soon settle that."

"Oh," said Wilmot, "and that too is my doing."

"I don't know but what he's the honestest man for it. But don't you fret, my dear, he's sat on an addled egg too long to believe in its ever hatching now. He'll listen to reason, and I'll have out Lawyer Grose and we'll put a clause in. Ay, we'll put a clause in," he yammered to himself.

"Can you ever forgive me, Mr. Hannaford? I'm going away. I'll do no more harm to Roger, if I can help it."

"Heh, my dear, it's pull dog, pull cat wi' man and woman, ever since the days of the apple. It only shows that my chap's been but half baked. I doubt but you'll have browned him to the top crust, cheeld. Now, just you go home to your own man. Be a good little wife and bring 'en twins the first chance you get."

Wilmot felt his relief at her going, felt his pitying regard of her grey-tipped waves of hair, her small frail body: no fit wife to be the mother of Hannaford bairns, his look said as plainly as possible. Somehow this stung more than anger would have done.

"You reckon, then, on my giving him up," she said, watching Mrs. Rouncevell lean forward rapturously at this betrayal of depravity. Her instinctive start goaded Wilmot to a wild rage.

"I've always paid," said she, savagely, "month after month, when I thought my folly had killed her son"—she pointed to Mrs. Rouncevell, who braced herself for a blow. "She kept silence. She wouldn't tell me that he was safe. She wouldn't put me out of my pain, though she knew what it meant to me. And so my child was born blind."

"She didn't say that," said Mr. Hannaford. He had no need to ask if it were true, for the woman's face revealed the truth.

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"And so I paid, through my child. Haven't I paid?" she demanded fiercely.

"Ay, you've paid," he answered.

"And I paid too," said Mrs. Rouncevell, rousing herself. "You drove him away. He's to be married soon, and he thinks no more of his mother than of an old shoe. He won't even come back to England."

She thought of the strange picture of himself that he had sent her: in the taut face and the tense lips that curved hungrily round the pipe stem she could see no trace of the child that had clung to her breast, of the lad that had feverishly resisted her, though she saw his father written there very plainly. He was not hers any longer; he was his father's, who spared neither man, woman, nor child in his will. And Mrs. Rouncevell could not see that the will of Archelaus was not the evil thing that his father's had been, and still less could she believe it, when she looked at the laughing fawn face of his betrothed.

"I don't ask your forgiveness," she continued firmly, "and I don't give you any, for to me there's no meaning in the word. But I say that you've paid, all the same, for your arms are as empty as mine."

"Ay, you've paid," said the old man.

The next moment his head dropped forward on his breast in the half-doze of senility. "Oh, good Lord," he whispered in dream, as Mrs. Rouncevell went to her own room across the passage, and left him in the lonely aloofness of age. For we shrink instinctively from passion before the old: they have passed that way so lately, yet they stand so far off, that we are shamed. So they put up high walls which the urchins may not climb when the workmen disturb a graveyard. The old only see the dust and bones of passion, as the younger generations feel.

An hour later Mrs. Rouncevell crept downstairs and

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stopped to listen outside the door of the parlour. She heard first Roger's voice and then Wilmot's, till the noise of an overturned chair and the muttered sound of a half-sob drove her upstairs again. She remembered in that moment what a quiver of hatred had thrilled through her as she watched Wilmot's graceful gestures, even in the moment of humiliation. She hated her tenfold now for the scene she divined behind those closed doors. Her wizened face nichered into a grin that showed her gap-toothed jaws as she clasped her bony elbows and whispered to herself, "Her arms empty, eh, my good Lord, her arms empty!"

For Mrs. Rouncevell had passed long years in Hunger Tower.

When she came down from Mr. Hannaford's room, Wilmot stood for a second at the foot of the stairs, gazing as if in trance at the picture of the courtyard framed in the whitewashed granite of the porch. Reaction had set in, and after the storm of thought which had raged through her nature, the senses asserted their power. From a far-off distance she felt it all: the rookety-coo of the pigeons on the roof, the purling fall of water into the milk-pails outside, the scent of seed-cakes from the kitchen, the snorts of the bob-tailed sheep-dog as he dreamt in the porch of rat-hunting. The quiet of the scene seemed the cosy warmth and comfort of a room where, through mortal pain, a new life is coming.

Then she turned and saw Roger watching her from the open door of the living-room. The whole scene behind him leapt to her eyes, like a mosaic in which every detail was separately perceived and remembered for ever. The dusky quiet within the room seemed to carry all the outside world to an immense distance; through the open windows, as she crossed the threshold, the voices of the stablemen came from a far-off void. The grotesque shadow of a



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cactus-plant in the low windows seemed closing in on her, as one dream fades into another, but before it passed, the room had stamped itself for ever on her brain; she saw plainly the row of toby jugs on the mantelpiece, the dusty array of silver cups, show prizes, on the sideboard, the print of the child Wesley being carried from the upper window of a burning house. She puzzled herself for a moment with the titles of the books that lay on the window-seat. It was a distress to her to remember that, although she had turned them over only a few days ago, she could not for the life of her now remember the names. Then it came in a flash: seed-catalogues, Pamela, Swinburne, the Pilgrim's Progress, and with the remembrance she felt her lips touching the rim of a glass. The wine was sweet and strong, sacramental, as she thought for a second, wondering at the complex web of life which brought the memory of sacrifice into this place of self-will.

With the return of thought she pushed away the glass that Roger was putting to her lips, and rose from the chair where he had placed her. It was no time to drug the senses, and by so doing numb the brain, and she shook her head as he pressed it on her.

"That woman," she began; and her voice sounding strange, she began again in a lower tone, "that woman." But she could not continue.

"Never mind her, Wilmot," said Roger, bending over to her.

"No, no," she said, withdrawing herself, "I want to think. Give me time. I knew what to think as I came down, but it has gone. You left me so much time to think, that I've forgotten it all."

"I was coming to you to-night. I had to struggle with myself. Then Mrs. Rouncevell came and showed me what I had to do."

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"What?"

"Think only of you, take you away from their lies into peace. Can you trust me? We must go away together. Then you will—he will give you your release, and we can be married."

"Oh," she said, memory coming back in a flash, "now I remember all that I felt up there." She glanced upwards towards the room overhead. "I said, why should I always suffer, always pay? I've been the one all through. No one has paid but me. I said, I would forget others, and fight only for my own hand."

"Then you will come?" he said quickly; just now the victory seemed an over-easy one.

"Why are you doing this, Roger?" she asked, bending forward in the growing dusk to peer in his face. "You owe me nothing. I deceived you grossly, and you barely understand me now."

Gradually the predominant desire in her began to be to realize his state of mind, to feel what it was like to decide as he was doing, against all the convictions of a lifetime.

"I owe you everything," he said sternly, "and we have a saying that the Hannafords never owe a man a farthing, or a woman a wedding-ring. Don't you know what's become of your good name? Are you such a child that you cannot realize how, through the folly of both of us, we must face it out now, in the straightest way that's left us, for your sake?"

"So that's it, is it?" she said to herself, turning away to pat a fallen fire-log with her foot. "That's it, out of pity." Then she laughed quietly, even genially. "You know, I really never gave it a thought what the people here may say. There's a world outside this little place, and what they say about me here hasn't the smallest place in my fancy. We're all law-breakers, we women, when

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it comes to the agony-point with us. Oh," she said, stretching out her hands, "if it were but this law and that law to think about, and not pain and misery in somebody's life, how easy it would all be! You can't see that, can you?"

He could not, for a man like Roger exchanges the fears of nature which his savage forefathers knew, for fears of the great machinery of civilization that man has himself created, and which now, for all but the strongest, binds him in on every hand. The great trusts, the gigantic companies, the paraphernalia of justice, the pronouncements of great newspapers, the laws of social life;—all these are, to men of Roger's calibre, facts as all-powerful as his own hot blood or the sure march of death. Civilized man has by now clothed himself with fears of his own manufacture as with a garment. Something of this was clear to Wilmot, and she even rejoiced in knowing it, since it made her own power the stronger.

"Oh," she laughed, "they are but gadflies, you know, these good people whom you fear so much."

"Ah," he flashed, "you've had experience, you see. I have not."

Then, as she winced, he said hastily, "Oh, forgive me. I oughtn't to have said that, but I'm not myself to-night."

"Nor am I," she answered, sitting down in a low wooden chair that stood by the hearth, where the fire, even in summer-time, was scarcely ever extinguished. "I'm not one woman, but a dozen to-night, I think."

In a flash, as she sat there in the low chair on which the bygone Hannaford women had nursed their children, he saw, with the heightened power of inward vision that comes in moments of nervous strain, why he could never bring her back to live at Ponsworthy, even if things ever so adjusted themselves that it would be possible to do so.

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In that moment he tasted exile: the bygone Hannaford women must not be pushed from their stools.

She answered his unspoken thought. "See," she said in level tones, "you are a generous man, and, out of pity for a woman of whom you know nothing, you are willing to ruin yourself. Let me tell you what I can of the truth of me. At home, long ago as a girl, my mother and sisters used to call me the ugly duckling, because of my brown body and pale face. Nobody, they said, would ever care for me. Then, you see, when Dr. Borlace asked me to come to him, I thought it would be nice to prove them wrong. And"—in a lower voice, so that he had to bend forward to catch her words—"when I found 'twas true that he didn't care for me, I thought no one ever would."

"My darling!"

"No, no, no! Wait," she said hoarsely. "Then I met . . . your cousin, and he cared. And I was hungry and forgot he was a boy—forgot that 'twas but curiosity in me, forgot that he must suffer. And when my child was blind I thought 'twas for my harshness to him. And that woman acted a lie to keep me longer in pain."

"Don't go on, child."

"I must. Qui s'excuse, s'accuse: good, I accuse myself—to you, for you have the right to hear. You have been generous. Roger, when I came here I ached, ached for my child, and I wanted to forget. You were my dram-drinking."

Somebody laughed in the firelight. Roger scarcely knew which of them it was.

"Can't you understand?" she asked desperately. "I was always in pain, deep down in me, where I couldn't quite forget—except with you."

She was standing now, holding him back with the palms of her two hands on his breast. The rough feel of his tweed coat was comforting to them.

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"And I? And he?"

"Ah," she said, turning away again, twisting tightly clasped hands, "he cared at last, he learnt to care for me."

"Not as I do."

"No; not as you do. So many men, so many loves."

"And you?"

"Ah, don't ask me."

"But I must; I will. What else is there to ask?"

"Ah, Roger, Roger, where are your gossips and your broken laws now? 'Tis agony-point with you too."

But the next moment she touched the electric forces that spin the whirling globe of life down the ages, as he closed his lips on hers, and their pulses throbbed as one.

"Closer, closer, till you bring me death," she whispered.

But the next second the bitter-sweet of passionate surrender ebbed into the acrid taste of disillusion.

"No, no," she said, as he would have found her lips again. "No, no; I cannot ruin two lives. You cannot bring me home here; here, where the good Hannaford women made the butter and nursed their babies. What should I teach your children, Roger, when they said their prayers—to pray not to be like mamma? That would be it, wouldn't it? Would not all your life be on a lower level, all spoilt, if you took me? Your ideals all tarnished?"

"In all the heavens that the good Hannaford women believed in," he said, swinging her off her feet, "there could never come a moment to you and me as good as this one."

"In all the whirling changes of life," she assented dreamily, "nothing so good as this."

Then she awoke. "Passion settles nothing," she said, slipping away from him. "What would you and I have to keep us together in the long years when you would only remember all you know of me, when I should think of what I have made him suffer? Ah, you would watch my

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children for the lightness you hate in me. And I—I should remember how I failed in the one and only trust that was ever committed to me, to help a struggling man who sinned for me. Ah, Roger, you'd never sin for me."

"What do you call this, then?" he said brutally.

There was a tense silence that snapped a chain.

"Oh," she said quietly at last, "that's the truth I've been waiting for. I heard the truth about him from a woman he helped, now I hear the truth about you at last."

"No," she said, standing in the doorway, "I'm sorry I should have broken up the tenor of your life here, for I understand that you blurted out your designs—your designs for the world's good," she mocked, "to your father. It was a pity so to reckon on my ruining everything for you. For, at any rate, it was entirely premature. If there is any ruin wrought in your life, it is yourself that is the author of it. Let every herring hang by its own tail. And for the ruin of Tony's life, we'll pick up the pieces together."

"And you'll tell him the truth; and if you do, do you think he'll take you back?"

"Take me back," she laughed, "yes, from the very streets."

"You put him higher than me, for you would never have said that of me."

"No, never," she confessed, "for you feel for me in proportion to the world's judgment of me. I know that now. But with Tony, haggard face, tired eyes, sinful heart: they are always but the Me that he wants. And that love lasts to the very end. Oh, he cannot draw the heart of me out as you can, he never will. But something in me answers to something in him. I never knew it till I met you, and missed the answer in you. For you judge, you condemn; he's by the side of me. He casts level shadows with me, and not one is a shadow of turning."

## CHAPTER XXXI

MAL D'AIMER

By noon next day Wilmot had reached the market-town of Dodonesse, halfway on the road to Challacombe. She determined to leave the train here and spend an hour or two, continuing her journey by steamer down the Dart as far as the village of Stoke Michael, whence she could again take train to Challacombe. By this means she would avoid reaching home in the full daylight, and might chance upon Johanna at Stoke Michael, for Johanna was by this time fast becoming to her what the keep used to be to a beleaguered garrison.

After the raw newness of the station Wilmot reached the High Street, with its rows of projecting "Butterwalks." Standing beneath the ancient North Gate, that spans the street like a bridge, she looked through its narrow needle-eye at the crowds below, for all the space called the "Plains," opposite the Seven Stars Hotel, was a sea of heads. It was a large market that day, and with difficulty she had forced her way through the crowd, whose faces, lined with exposure and reddened with high fare and spirit-drinking, stood out against the brilliant sunlight with the virile insistence of Assyrian sculpture. Between the old houses of the long main street that descends the hill towards the bridge, loud-voiced prosperity surged against a background of clatter from the steaming doors of eating-houses. The fierce, battering nerve-siege of crude humanity began to creep insidiously over the lonely spectator. She was tired and

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hungry, but she felt that it was impossible to force herself into any of the shops that reeked with meat and drink, and echoed with the loud chaffering of the eaters. The teeming town, once a mart for the great cloth-weaving industry of the West, and now the heart of a rich agricultural district, seemed to Wilmot the very centre of that masculine force that fights and "downs" its opponents in the struggle for the means to feed the pounding life in its veins. She shivered till the tears came, and the immediate impulse of flight turned into a longing for Roger: she would not have gone hungry or frightened with him near.

Just above her head she saw the notice "Guildhall Steps," and ascending the flight, Wilmot found herself in a moment far above the crowd and standing on a grey paved way that wound between the roofs of the High Street shops.

The noise of the press below came up only as a dull roar, till the path led her altogether away from even the sound of it, as far as the pillared entrance to the Guildhall, once the priory of St. Mary's. The silvery greyness of this corner of old-time peace was disturbed by no note of colour save that supplied by a cluster of yellow seeding wallflowers, self-sown from some grave in the churchyard opposite.

The door was open, and Wilmot strayed into the old court. It was panelled in oak and fitted with seats for witnesses and lawyers, with a prisoners' bench in front of the raised seat of the judge. Pictures of Dodonesse worthies of bygone centuries and framed copies of town records covered the walls between the latticed windows, that opened on the one side on to a tracery of orchard leaves, and on the other into the shining greyness of the square, with the worn granite of the church keeping off some of the splendour of the sunshine. Wilmot stepped into the prisoners' dock, and stood with her back to the stone-paved,



well-like court that opened on the mortuary. A low door to the side of the judge's chair led to the cells: it was the Sessions Court of Dodonesse. The moving finger of a sun-ray slanted through the leaded window-pane from some quivering apple bough outside, and flickered through the motes of dust on the pallor of her face.

Arraigned before the ideal judge, who could fathom motives and weigh in the balance personal will and racial prepossession, what verdict would be passed on her? Had not her flight from Roger been due merely to a woman's instinctive dread of irrevocable action? Was not the very code that would have condemned her derived only from the man-made laws that respect solely the man's sense of property? "His wife, his ox and his ass, and all that he hath." The law stood condemned by her womanhood, for this was but chattel slavery. Yet something harder far than law condemned her personally, namely, the claims of other lives on her forbearance, claims that pass far harder sentences than any judge or jury.

Turning slowly to descend from the dock, she noticed without any surprise that Roger Hannaford was leaning against the doorpost of the hall, so that his shadow darkened the worn steps. Somehow she had felt him behind her all day, and she was ready; for the real strength of the emotional nature lies in the fact that, once backed with mental judgment, it answers to the call, true to the moment's need.

"So you followed me?" she said, joining him at the door and turning down the paved way to the street.

"You didn't think you were going to escape me so easily, did you?"

"Aren't you making it harder for me?" she said, pausing for a moment at the top of the flight of steps into the High Street. She was consoled like a child, for the moment, by

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his mere presence, since the long day that was before them would number several hours at least.

"I mean to make it as hard as a man can make it," he said grimly.

She did not contest the point. "Roger," she said plaintively, "I'm so hungry. Take me somewhere where we can get lunch. I didn't dare to go by myself."

Roger looked down at her with that blissful air of proprietorship that really goes a long way towards excusing in the male his arrogant mastery: the creature rejoices so naïvely in it that it is difficult to keep up for long the attitude of feminine scorn.

Presently they were sitting at an open window of the Seven Stars looking down on the masses of men below, who somehow were no longer terrible or antagonistic to Wilmot, as she composedly went on with her meal.

"It's good to be looked after—so good, Roger," she said, suddenly leaning halfway across the narrow table.

"That's why you ran away, I suppose. I've always heard that when a woman particularly likes a thing, she makes up her mind she oughtn't to have it."

"She's been repenting, you see," laughed Wilmot, expansively pushing back her hat from her forehead, "ever since she found how dearly she had to pay for the apple episode."

"Eve's daughters aren't a patch on old Eve, after all; for she knew when she wanted a thing, and they don't."

"Roger, why did you come to such a public place as this? Somewhere in the town where you wouldn't be so well known would have been better. Why did you come here?" asked Wilmot, suddenly, noticing a curt nod pass between Roger and a man at the next table.

"Can't you answer that for yourself?" he said, looking her squarely in the eyes.

She saw that for Roger it was a crossing of the Rubicon, and hardened in her decision that no trapping into a public recognition of the position should have the slightest weight with her. When their meal was over, he leant across the table and said—

“And what next?”

“I’m going back.”

“To Uppacott?”

“No; to Challacombe, by the afternoon boat.”

“All right. I’ll come too.”

“Roger, don’t be absurd. Don’t you understand? I meant what I said. I’m going back.”

“I’ll swear I don’t understand anything but this, that I’m going with you, and I’m going to see it out. But we’ll not go by a wretched steamer. I’ll row you down.”

“As far as Stoke Michael, then, where I can cross the ferry and get up to the junction for Challacombe. You can come with me to Stoke Michael, if you like.”

They escaped from the crowd at the bridge, and while Roger was choosing a boat at the quay steps, she saw how helpless she had made herself; but the ease of momentary acquiescence, the woman’s pitfall, possessed her.

As the boat passed below the overhanging trees of Sharpham wood, where the leaves loom out of a mist of grey lichen, the town behind them shone in the splendour of sunlight, its church spire towering above in a golden flash. With its chimes came the memory of their first talk in the valley below the cathedral of the moor. The power of resistance that Johanna’s strength had supplied passed from her at the recollection, and everything became dream-like as the sounds of the work-a-day world faded into the wash of the Dart against the gunwale of the boat and the creaking of the oars in the rowlocks.

After her many restless nights the quiet passed into

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a sleep, from which she was only roused for a moment at feeling herself covered with a rug. Soon afterwards the boat lay heaving on the basin of the tidal river opposite the landing-stage of Stoke Michael. The shadows of the yellow-tinted houses fell across the oily water, where the pools of quiet light glowed like mirrors in the evening sunshine. Nestling deep down in plum trees, only a few cottage roofs could be seen above the orchards. Roger leant on his oars watching the scene, for it brought back to his mind a story of herself that Wilmot had once told him.

Where the Dart makes a great bend below Uppacott is the Corner Pool, black above its rocks and fringed with royal fern. Into this pool Wilmot had flung her wedding-ring. He could see the flash of the gold circlet high over the water against the birch trees opposite, for it was spring when she had cast off the symbol of possession. It was this memory that urged him to resist the temptation of rowing on to Regiswear, where it would be a more difficult journey for Wilmot back to Challacombe, and where there were sea-going vessels. No, he decided, she must make her own choice with the same zest and freedom with which she had flung her ring into the Corner Pool.

The next minute the boat began to ground against the landing-stage, and in the shock of sudden awakening the mirrors of light on the river sent a shock of pain to Wilmot's eyes.

When their tea, served in a room looking over the ferry, was over, she suddenly blew out the lamp they had placed in a dim corner of the room, and, coming behind where Roger sat, she put her arm round his neck and drew his head down against her face. The touch of his short crisp hair was strange to her, and the beating rhythm of their two hearts seemed to fill the universe. But she felt herself immeasurably older and stronger than he.

"I'm going now," she said, smoothing back the hair from his forehead. "Let me go quietly, dear heart."

"I'll not," he said, her hands gripped in his. "Listen, listen, they go well together, our two hearts. Better even than last night. How can we part like this? Why should we? You were woman enough to fling your ring into the Corner Pool, fling——"

"Myself after it," she finished for him. "You and I, Roger, are no lovers of the grand old times, to love and die. We should just love and live. Wait," she said, stopping his mouth with her hand, "we should just live on, getting lower and lower in each other's eyes every day. You can't love like the old heroic lovers, dear, at least you can't love me like that. For you cannot forget that I'm spoilt in other folks' eyes for ever. Let me go."

"You ask what isn't possible of a man. Besides, we have gone too far. You are known here and in Dodonesse, and so am I. We have been seen together all day."

But she paid no heed, for the parts of man and woman were reversed, and the details which would, under ordinary circumstances, have swallowed up the chief point, were not even present in her mind.

"You'd never forget that you were the first Hannaford to bring a tarnished reputation into the family, and you would never love my children as you would have loved another woman's. Up there, at Ponsworthy, every stranger would be told our story. I mightn't care, but you would."

"But we shouldn't live there."

"Ah, you see, I alter your whole life, drag it down everywhere."

"What you've done in that way is done, isn't it? You think of every one but me. The years to come, what do they matter? They may never come, and if they do, we shall change with them."

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"Yes, you'll change. It's just that which I am reckoning on. And what about the others whose trust in us we wreck? It was those others I thought of first, but now I won't come to you for your own sake."

"What others? The husband who left you alone all those months?"

"Yes, you're right. That's the other. I cannot cause him more sorrow."

"And my sorrow? That's nothing to you?"

"See here," she said, with a wide-flung gesture that spoke of the free working of the mind that was escaping from the toils of the senses, "it's the old test of Solomon over again, the old test of which loves most, you or he. For I must cause pain to one or other of you, and you love me less, for your love will pass with the years, nay, the moments, and his will not."

"And you?" he said hoarsely, "for to me that is all."

She noticed even then, as a woman at nervous tension notices everything, that he never disputed her words.

"Deep down, it's you who are the stranger to me, and not he," she said, as if the words were shaken out of her.

He made no movement as she passed out of the room and swiftly down the stairs to the inn door.

"Tell me where Johanna Buckingham lives," she called to a child in the lane outside. "Take me to her."

To a woman who so often contests a situation and settles a fate with a wisp of chiffon or a feather, small outward facts can give much comfort, and to Wilmot the very thickness of the walls of Johanna's cottage and the great bolts of the door were consoling, for they seemed to offer that protection from temptation which she had really to supply from within. She found herself in a small bare room, with but little in it, save a table and few chairs, all long since reduced to primitive nakedness by much

scrubbing. Johanna was kneeling before the fire by a round wash-tub, in which sat Elizabeth, who was rapturously squeezing the sponge over her gleaming chest and flanks.

"Are you alone in the house, Johanna? Let me stay here to-night if you are," said Wilmot, hurriedly fastening the door behind her.

"I'm alone, right enough," said Johanna, her heart leaping with a flicker of temptation, as she saw the drawn look on her mistress's face; "but I thought you'd gone back by now."

"I ought to have, but he followed me here, and I can't go on to-night. I want to stay where he can't find me."

She laid her head on Elizabeth's skin-warmed flannels that lay across a chair.

Johanna understood. "Eh, my dear," said she, "don't 'ee, now, don't 'ee. You'll tear yourself all to bits, and you mustn't go back to him looking like a death's head. For then he'll think you didn't want to come, and 'twill be to him as bad as if you never had come back."

"It's always first one 'he' with you and another with me, Johanna."

"Iss, we'm made so," assented Johanna.

In the meanwhile Elizabeth's splashings were making the ground very wet.

"And," said Johanna, in her everyday manner, "it's hair-washing for Elizabeth to-night. But when that's done I'll get something warm for 'ee."

Presently under Johanna's square capable fingers Elizabeth's curls stood out round her temples in a tangled halo.

"Cying," said she wisely, nodding at Wilmot, in an aside to her mother.

"Johanna," said Wilmot, as, for a second, a night-dress obscured the 'halo,' "let her sleep with me to-night. Do

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you remember how I slept after Avis was born? It's so long since I had a child to sleep with me. But perhaps you'd rather she didn't."

"My heavens," laughed Johanna, holding the curled-up form in the crook of her arm, "and I bore her, and she lies by me night after night. Iss fay, she's none too good to lie long side of 'ee."

They could read each other's half-expressed thoughts to-night as unconsciously as one obeys one's own instincts.

Johanna sat down in the rocking-chair and began to croon to the child in a tone that sounded a note lower than the bleating of the sheep outside.

"Does it ever come back to trouble you, Johanna, that life of yours before you came to us?"

"Night-times, if I'm tired out. But it's mostly going, even the thought of it," said Johanna, as if the question were the most natural one in the world. "I often think 'tis like the finger-marks upon my great-aunt's arm."

"Tell me," said Wilmot.

"Augh, 'tis a queer old tale. But there, nuther you nor me has yet to learn that there's queer things in this here world. My great aunt was a Chown and lived down Lizard way. Coming back from market one evening by Poldhu Cross, her seed a light ahead by the four-cross-roads, a light same as you see in the sky over a town night-times. But 'twas gone when her come by. Her lived then with her old father, totelin he was, pretty near, and her asked 'en that night why folks wouldn't go by Poldhu Cross of a night. And said he, 'There was a wrecker buried there in the old ancient days, and if so, you're kin to he, for chap was a Chown, they say.'

"That night her knowed that her'd brought something home with her from the cross, for lying over chair-back there was something white. A cloth, thought she, but



'twas gone when her come nigh it. And in the night her woke sudden to see a great moonbeam right across her bed. All of a whirl o' light it was, and in the midst there come a face, with no eyelids, but hair that shook as if in the wind from a chimney. And then her gripped and gripped her own hands, for her could feel the lust to kill come into her, to clipse and clipse a neck closer and closer, till the eyes started and the breath went. And there her was, alone in the house with her old father."

Johanna stooped forward to cast up a fallen cinder.

"The next thing her knowed, her feet felt the cold floor o' the stone passage, and her was outside her father's door, with the lust to kill in her and the lidless eyes of what her'd brought from the Cross fixed upon hers. And all round the smell o' seaweed, like in a deep cave. Her tried the Lord's Prayer, but her couldn't say a word, and then suddenly something passed from her and left her kneeling upon the passage floor, with the old man safe inside. They'd served 'en cruel, that old wrecker, you see, and he wanted her to kill so that he could have his desire through her."

"But the marks?"

"Four finger-prints upon her left arm just above the wrist, same as if he'd creamed her arm with his fingers. And her'd a belief that if they didn't fade before her death, her'd go wherever he was that had put the mark on her."

"Did they go?"

"Ay, one by one they faded slowly as the years went. Her washed 'em out, I reckon, for her wore away her strength in tending the sick and caring for the old. There wasn't one like her anywhere in that parish for loving-kindness, that I'll go bail. And when they laid her in the coffin her arm was as free o' marks as yours or mine. I'm marked too, I reckon, though I can't see 'em, but there's ways of cleaning 'em off. It may tear 'ee sore, but it can be done."

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It was that question which had moved Wilmot in the Sessions Court, the possibility of purification, that re-gaining of stainlessness which all religions have enshrined in the imagery of sacrifice and the blood of a victim. But that sense of the indomitable which was Johanna's inheritance put an end to idle questioning, for into the shadowy doubts of the mind her power cut with the clean blow of steel.

"But," said Wilmot, "one part of me wants what the other part of me doesn't want; and as for you, I know what it must be to you to see me going back to Challacombe. Who made us, you and me, to fall and struggle so uselessly?"

"God, I reckon," said Johanna, softly patting the sleeping child.

"Ah, yes, so you say; but you don't understand what you're really saying, after all. For what does the word mean? Nothing to anybody. It's only a way of saying we can't understand."

"See here, missus," said Johanna, holding Elizabeth's fat toes in her hand to warm them, "have 'ee ever seen the lights spring out night-times over the moor, when the dimpsy light is coming down?"

"Often."

"Well, there's some lights that come of a farthing dip and some of a lamp, but there's one thing a body can be sure of all of 'em."

"Yes?"

"That when the light starts up, Somebody lighted it. Every light means something human, and it's the same with the pains that wring the heart of us. There's God there somewhere. That's all I know. And I can't tell 'ee what human means, no more'n I can what God means. But where there's lights, there's a man or woman, and where there's heart-pains, there's God, just the same."

It was a deeper rendering of the saying attributed to the Master who incarnated in life the human thirst to render itself god-like. "Cleave the wood, and I am there; lift the stone, and there am I."

A couple of hours later, Johanna crept upstairs with a basin of bread-and-milk for her guest, who lay in the worm-eaten four-poster by the child. But the tinkle of cup and spoon and the prospect of food, more powerful than any whirl of human words, awoke the little sleeping animal. She insisted on sharing Wilmot's meal, fetching out pieces of soaked bread with a pink fore-finger, and happily devouring them as she blinked sleepily in the candlelight.

"She's like a fat skin—stuffed full of warmth," said Wilmot, snuggling the creature closer to her. "But where are you going to sleep to-night, Johanna?"

"Oh, I'll do well enough on the settle downstairs. I'm strong enough to sleep on the floor if need be."

She was thinking that, as this was the last of the milk in the house, she would have to be up early at the farm for more, since there was now nothing but bread and tea in the house.

"Elizabeth," said Wilmot, "do you remember Avis, that you used to see when you came to me?"

But Elizabeth shook her head.

"She's just a little shadow now, even to me, you know, Johanna," said Wilmot.

"Iss, and it's better so, for they do say that they can't go, they'm tied down here, as long as we weary for 'em, the dead little ones. My mother used to tell me that, when the wild birds called over the moor. Let the little shadow go, missus, we be going her way fast enough."

"And yet you love your own child so much that once you told me you'd go back to your old life—for her. Would you?"

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"If there was no other way to keep her. But I'd never tend her again."

"You couldn't do it, Johanna. I don't believe it."

"There's that in me, since I've begun to go up, that would carry me where I'd a mind to go. And I've often wondered, too, whether we weren't bearing for other women what the weaker ones couldn't, we who live like I did, and then it didn't seem so bad. But you've got a hard day to-morrow."

She blew out the light and sat for a long while, gently tapping Wilmot's shoulder as she had done her child's. And under the power of human strength, and in the sweeps of the night wind over the meadows, Wilmot found the force of rest that girdles all the world. Then Johanna stole softly away; had there been any there to watch her face, they would have seen the woman's strength that watched ages ago in the Roman market-place over the sleeping virgins. She lay awake for hours downstairs, for it is one by one to the lonely heights—those heights so hardly gained, flint-strewn too, and at times, as now, crossed by the zigzag lightning of passion. Then at last the dawn crept through the glimmering window-pane, with the twittering of birds and the sullen drip of rain-drops.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### A BERSERK EXIT

THE old builders often laid the foundations of their strongest bridges on sacks of wool, weight-resisting, though the softest substance procurable. In the same way man, the first conscious bridge-builder in the scale of creation, founds the pillars that support his arches in renunciation, which, though it shrinks from the touch of pain, quivering and sensitive like living flesh, is yet stronger than the more rigid qualities. Call the abyss between the beast and angel in humanity what we may, man, "he who looks up," can only span the depths between the lower life of slavery and the higher life of mastery by pain, often self-inflicted, and always willingly endured. At first the quivering foundations bear their load easily, for it is not until the never-ceasing pressure of the weight becomes felt that the sense of impotent revolt sets in.

It was thus in a mood of conscious self-mastery, the most exhilarating of emotions, that Wilmot returned to Challacombe. Nothing seemed too hard for her to endure, as she wrote a note to Captain Penrice to announce her arrival some time in the course of the day; but she waited in Johanna's cottage till the afternoon before setting out. The sea-wind that greeted her as she left the train seemed like the notes of an orchestra in the rhythm of a triumph song. It was not until she sat at tea with the captain and his wife that the reaction set in. It began at the sight of the prim perfection of that tea-table, as she mentally compared it with the rough-and-ready meals to which she had now become accustomed at Uppacott. The flowers in low vases, the many kinds of cakes, the bright silver; her gorge

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rose at it all, when she remembered William's pies and half-boiled potatoes, the liqueurs, the smell of pipes in her uncle's house before the reign of Miss Dorothy Penaluna began. For with the change in viands a change in tone had set in; the eminently calm conversation that skated neatly over the thin ice of the proprieties, the absorption of both husband and wife in details of domestic management and furniture, the chuckling delight of Captain Penrice in the acquisition of two huge Japanese jars at a sale: she watched it all in bewilderment. At last it dawned upon her that the apparent pre-occupation of Captain Dickie in these details was due to his wife's leading. Mrs. Penrice had coldly welcomed Wilmot, and had still more coldly directed the conversation to trifles. The captain took his cue from her, as was sufficiently evident, and Wilmot suspected serious curtain lectures.

When the interminable meal came to an end at last, Wilmot pushed back her chair with a noisy movement that grated on Mrs. Penrice's ears.

"Uncle Dickie, can I speak to you alone?" she said rudely. "There is something I have to ask, before I go across to Tony."

"I will sit in the other room till you are at liberty, Richard," said his wife, with eyebrows rising towards her hair. "Perhaps I might be permitted to remind you that you have a class at seven to-night."

"A Bible-class?" laughed Wilmot. "Uncle Dickie is becoming pious in his old age."

The two women's eyes flashed lancet-glances, and the captain groaned. He only just managed to prevent its being an outward demonstration.

"Your uncle," said Mrs. Penrice, firmly, "has never been one to forget the duty a man of his talents owes to others."

"My dear," said the captain, deprecatingly, "I sent

down to Albion Wyatt to put the class off when I heard that Wilmot was coming to-day."

"I say no more," said his wife, sailing out of the room.

"Is the door shut, my dear?" he asked anxiously, as Wilmot stretched out her arms with a gesture of relief.

"Oh, Uncle Dickie, Uncle Dickie, and she used to be a real human woman."

"My dear," said he, still with a nervous glance behind him, "she's upset."

"And she's altering you into a martinet, old man," said Wilmot, pulling his ears preparatory to settling herself on his knee. "Why, I could have screamed when she talked of the six ways of cleaning carpets. And you've never hugged me properly since I came in."

"Eh, my bird. Your aunt——"

"Oh, Uncle Dickie, don't use that word."

"Well, I won't. You see, she's in harbour, she wanted to have a house and a man. She's got in. She's happy, and she can't see why those who've got a house and a man too don't keep up the dignity of the state. To those outside the pale she's as warm-hearted as anybody. Why, when I condemned Johanna, she understood in a second, and stood over her like a dragon."

"Uncle Dickie," said Wilmot, solemnly raising her eyes to his, "it's because she understands only too well that she's hard with me. She's a woman, she knows."

"Ladybird," said he, gently, "is it so bad as that?"

"It's very bad, Uncle Dickie; almost as bad as it can be."

The scent of the captain's special brand of tobacco filled the room. With a little cry of pleasure she suddenly savoured it, and as she did so the last twelve months faded, and she saw what a long way she had travelled since she left Challacombe.

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"Tell me," said he, holding his heavy hands on her shoulders, "can you go back to the doctor?"

"I want to. That's why I'm here now. You knew that when I wrote, didn't you?"

"My bird, you must never be afraid of me. There isn't anything as you could do would make me hard to 'ee—not anything. But a husband's different. There's things he can't go back upon, it wouldn't be nature."

He was watching her dainty head and thinking, with a thrill of pride that mingled with his dread of what he might have to hear, that there was nothing in Challacombe to compare with her.

"I'll tell you," she said, twisting a button of his coat. "You've guessed it, of course. There was some one else that cared for me, that I—wanted. And now I know what Tony felt for me through what I've felt. Oh, I can't explain! Can't you see, Uncle Dickie? I didn't know Tony cared till Johanna told me. And I know now that wrong hurts others, else there wouldn't be any wrong."

"Yes, I see."

"Oh, it's all your fault, Uncle Dickie. Why did you let me marry till I knew what life was? You knew what there was in me, what strong feelings."

"My dear, I know. I've said so to myself ten thousand times."

"And then you never came near me all these months; you left me alone, as you'd never done in your life before, when I wanted you most. But you've changed. You're getting a smooth man, you old Esau, and it's that woman."

"Wilmot," said the captain, much exercised, "it was you yourself who ordered me to leave you alone."

"And didn't she?"

"And if she did, the doctor said the same, that he'd



have no third person coming between you two. And you said the same."

"And that's all the more reason why you should have interfered. Let me go to Tony. I won't see Miss Penaluna any more, for a woman always understands either too much or too little. I don't know which it is."

"You'll find the doctor changed. And you've only just come in time to find him here. We see little enough of him now, but I believe he's packing to-night the things reserved from the sale. He doesn't talk, you know, now, as he used to do, so I really know little enough of his movements. He isn't as he used to be, hand-in-glove with everybody."

Wilmot closed the front door of Dashpers noiselessly behind her. The square hall was in dusk, for no light had yet been lit, yet she saw that the house was dismantled: the stair-carpet was gone, and her room to the right looked empty when seen through the half-opened door. The door of the doctor's room on the opposite side was also ajar, and she could hear him pulling out the drawer of his writing-table. A half-empty packing-case stood in the middle of the floor, with piles of books all round it. Suddenly the bookish atmosphere struck her with a sense of pleasure; she was once more in the land of mental effort, of literary appreciation. Uppacott, Ponsworthy, by contrast, seemed the land of crude savages. In this calmer world she was really more at home: she had left the air of "Wuthering Heights" for the subtler atmosphere of "Villette." With a smile she thought how the doctor would have found quite as much of flame in "Villette" as in "Wuthering Heights," a flame no less scorching for its subterranean smouldering. With a pang she remembered the miserable little list of books at Ponsworthy. She was thinking in a language which Roger could not have followed. He seemed out in the cold, poor fellow.

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Then she tiptoed across the hall, and with a forefinger pushed the door further open. The doctor's profile was then towards her, as he wrote in the light of a green-shaded lamp. The jarring heart-beat that had shaken her grew gradually quieter as she watched him, and she smiled to herself at the silk hat he wore, tilted back on his neck in the old style, for fear of imaginary draughts. Science apart, Dr. Tony, like most men, regarded the protection of the head as of primary importance.

Presently he turned, perhaps with a sense of her eyes upon him, and she cried out, for his full face showed him lantern-jawed, hollow-eyed, with grey hair on the temples, a far older man than he had been a year ago. He half rose at the sight of her, but she pushed him back, and, kneeling, laid her hands on his arm. As she did so her long dust-cloak fell back, and he saw the lace on her bodice, the rose she wore, the slim neck above the graceful confusion at her breast. From under her hat a loose tendril of hair touched his face, bringing with it the fresh sense of her dainty life.

The hardness of months was melting fast, the whole world of emotion which he thought gone for ever had come back at the sight, the touch, the honeysuckle breath of her. But rising into consciousness came every few seconds to him a weary aching of the limbs and a dimness of sight. Neither moved for a moment, till the heat of his hand burnt into hers.

"Tony," she cried, "you are ill. I've come back, I want to make up to you." Her voice trailed away into shadowy sounds.

At her voice he awoke from his stupor and turned the shade of the lamp aside, so that they remained in semi-darkness. Ringing from far away there seemed to come to him the sound of bells, that approached and receded as if with the wind. He knew then that he must string himself together.

"I thought," he said, quietly, "that we should have found

marriage as easy as other folks seem to find it. But I was mistaken. We were originals, I suppose." He laughed grimly.

"No, no; I was wrong all through. I distrusted you. I wanted you to be splendid for my own glorification and I never saw my own selfishness. And I condemned you unheard, when I found you had let the council have their way, against your own knowledge."

"Do you know why I did that?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," she said simply, "I know now. It was because you cared for me."

"I'll tell you exactly," he said, in low tones, looking straight in front of him. "I did as you say—let 'em have their own way with the pipes. Then I found the symptoms I'd expected again and again in my patients, muscular convulsive attacks, anæmia, all the rest of it. I wouldn't acknowledge the cause, though I treated the symptoms. Then I had 'health' pipes put in the workhouse, because our beautiful social system drives honest workers there; but we needn't consequently poison them. I put 'health' pipes in this house too, because at that time you honoured me with your company."

"I know, I know it all—and why you did it."

"Ay," he said, looking away, "that's another story altogether. And now I'm going. This is my last night here. In another hour or so I'll be away."

"I wanted you to be a strong man, to get your own way."

"I knew it," he said triumphantly; "that's where the pit-fall for me was."

"But to be it splendidly, honestly, not for show only."

"Ay, that's where I misread you."

"I knew underneath how hateful I was, and when Avis went I had to fly in the face of the universe. You understood that."

"And I sold an entire township to please you"—he

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laughed—"told 'em lies by the dozen to win a well-done from a little wench. And all the time I was doing just what she'd backed me not to do. And whether it's a farce or a tragedy, the Lord only knows. Anyway, by now, nobody's a pin the worse for me—save you. And I don't see the way out of our muddle—our own special private muddle, you know."

He pushed her gently away. She watched his manner change to roughness, and knew that all this while she had but been talking to gain time.

"Tony," she said, grasping her own left arm, "I've done wrong. When I left here, mad with pain, I met some one else. No, that isn't true; I put myself in his way, and I let him think I was free. He cared for me."

"And you?" he asked, in a voice that grated; it was Roger's question over again. She began to have a mad sense that at bottom all men must be alike.

"I felt how he'd hate me in years to come, for he couldn't forget others and what others would say. Deep down, the others and their opinions were dearer to him than I. He would have come to feel me a shame to him. But you never would, Tony. All the deep waters of sin would never carry me far away from that knowledge. And so I've come back."

"Because I've no sense of shame," he sneered. "But you haven't answered my question. I'm not concerned with his feelings. It's yours I want to know. Oh, no subtleties; plain truth, please."

"I should have wearied of him; he carried me away. He was like the glittering stones in a jeweller's window. A poor woman longs for them when she's tired and shabby, but deep down in her she wouldn't give up the satisfaction of struggling and making her own way for all the jewels in the world. Oh, I wanted the glitter; but I know which I want now."

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"So tarnished, you come back to the dulness. Ay, it's appropriate enough. And which of us two has the right to you?" he asked, turning the light full on her face.

"You, Tony. There's no reason that I shouldn't come back to you. I'm as innocent—as the world counts innocence—as when Avis was here."

"You don't lie," he said, with a deep breath, "not in words at any rate."

"Not," she said, lifting her eyes to his face, "that it matters in the deep places how you've lived in the body, when the master of the soul of you comes."

But that was the sting of it for him.

"That may be," he said quietly, "but I'm not master of the soul of you."

"I cannot tell," she said sadly, "but I know he is not, and I know I shall be a hindrance to him and a help to you. And if one must suffer, let it not be you."

"The judgment of the wise king"—he laughed bitterly. "But you take me for more or less than a man. Which, I don't know. Anyway, I'm neither, but just a man—a man who wants, not a comrade only, but a wife. And you come with this tale to me, and ask me to take you back. No, you ask more than mortal man could give. You've been afraid of me, you've hated me, and you've despised me."

"And yet there's nothing that I could do that would make you not love me, Tony."

"Ay, God help me, that's true. But that's the very reason I cannot take you back. It's a mad world, my masters, and the maddest fellow in it is the man that puts his fate in the hands of a woman. I'll never do it again. I'll make a clean sweep of our old life here."

"Tony, take me, on any terms. Just to try to be an honest help to you, just to blot out—Tony, just to do what I can to help you."

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"No, I cannot. I care too much for you to do it."

"Ah," she said to herself, "that must be the depths of me, at last." For to hear it was the supreme joy; it touched a higher note than the lyric raptures of passion; it was the mastery of spirit.

The next moment she knew that she had won.

"Here," he said, "I'll take you at your word. You shall work side by side with me, at harder work than you've ever put your dainty, helpless little hands to in all your life. Mind, you'll do the work I'll give you. You'll obey me literally."

"If I may go with you."

"Faith," he laughed, "you shall go with me, sure enough. This very next hour we'll be off. The first thing is to get this box of books packed."

With trembling hands and beating hearts, that made clumsy fingers, the two bent to their task. Before it was finished, there were a good many abrasions on the soft skin of Wilmot's hands.

"Now, then," he said, when the last nail had been driven into the cover, "for Stoke Michael."

"Stoke Michael," she said faintly. "I came that way from Uppacott."

"I hope you didn't drink any water there, then, for they're thick in poison. Diphtheria among the children, and two cases of typhoid already."

"Oh," she said, with a sudden start, "that's why Johanna wanted me away, and why she went up the hill so far for water."

"Ay, trust her for not being caught napping. Well, I'm glad she's there too, for she'll be a more useful helper than you."

The sardonic, half-brutal humour was strong upon him now. Wilmot watched him silently.

"Eh, my dear, there's a big world outside, where the work's waiting to be done, outside our little hothouse tragedies of woman and man. It's always waiting, that world outside, waiting for help. You're going to learn what 'tis to stand and serve it till you drop. That's enough for the present, I reckon. I've been a fool. I've kept you in cotton-wool, to keep the wind of real life off you. I've made you a weakling. Now we'll brace you, little wench."

In a half-Berserk rage he caught her wrist, as the front-door bell rang loudly, and outside the windows sounded the jingling harness of a horse and trap.

"That's the man to drive me to the ferry. Come," he said, running her along the hall to the door by her tightly clasped hand. In that moment Wilmot felt how like Tony it was to feel that the burden of decision was lightened for him by an outward circumstance. He had never been of the elect band who make the future by bending the present to their will, and but for the incident of this sudden call for help at Stoke Michael, he would never have braced her spirit to the trial. It was a cruel thought, maybe, but the cruelest instincts leap, at crucial moment, to the depths of truth.

"Gad," laughed the doctor to himself, as he flung her bag and his into the back of the dog-cart, "and the little hussy thinks she's going to be a martyr, and go down into the fire of pestilence, and run all sorts of risks, and be an almighty hero." Wilmot could hear him laugh to himself as he sprang into the back seat, shouting a mad good-bye to the astonished captain, who had come to the garden gate at the sound of all the bustle. She felt very much like the maiden whom the cold black steeds of Pluto carried to the nether world. The sparks flew from the horse's hoofs as they struck the granite pavement. Such was their good-bye to Challacombe, that place of a stone.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### A LATTER-DAY "TAMING OF THE SHREW"

YELLOW spume, honey-coloured in the rays of the lanthorn, fringed the steps at the jetty against which the tide lapped as it slowly filled the weed-hung reaches of the river-bed, heaving in the long, slow, half-perceptible uprise that marks the method of nature's most sure and beneficent processes. With the turn of the tide came a wandering wind, too light to do more than faintly stir the tree-tops in the sleeping woods behind, yet distinguishable on the skin by the burning touch of it. It might have come from the fire-scorched sun-blaze of the desert, instead of from the moist languor of these river banks, where the myrtles and magnolias fill the air o' nights with their differing charm of purity and sensuousness. In the heavy air the echoes of the ferry-bell rolled away up the river towards Dodonesse, as Dr. Borlace pulled vigorously to summon the ferry-men.

Every one of his actions to-night was purposeful, and each movement, minute as it might be, led logically to the next, so that no second was wasted; the Berserk rage in which he had left Challacombe had given place to a calculated energy such as Wilmot had never before observed in him.

Once in the boat, every nerve in her tightened in answer to the concentration she divined in her husband's mood. As she watched the measured strength of his stroke, which was sufficient to put fresh power into the lifeless, mechanical rowing of the men, she felt herself touching a strange electric force, none the less strange for the simple struggle in which



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it was to be engaged, since it was, indeed, but the inspiration by which men lead.

Over there, where the cottage lights twinkled out one after the other as their boat neared Stoke Michael, the battle waited, the battle with the outraged force of nature's laws. She recalled what Dr. Borlace had told her on the drive downwards, a story of long neglect and of warnings repeatedly disregarded. The primitive sanitation of the place and the water-supply drawn from polluted wells had both become an active source of disease during this abnormally hot summer. Of this neglect the harvest was now being gathered in: typhoid among the adults and diphtheria among the children. Two visiting doctors came to the village each twice a week at ordinary times, but with their large districts they were quite unable to cope adequately with a situation that was daily growing more serious. As Dr. Borlace told her dryly that he had made up his mind "to put in a week or two at the place till this tyranny was overpast," she knew how he was inwardly rejoicing at the chance thus offered him. For, surely, it would be a measure of atonement for any harm he had done, and, at any rate, it proved conclusively that he had been justified in the pressure he had brought to bear on the council with respect to Challacombe. For the conditions in the two places were similar, though in the larger and more densely populated Challacombe they would have proved infinitely more serious. In a word, Stoke Michael justified the doctor over and over again.

The interest of this pause before the work began was so vivid that it even effaced in Wilmot the memory of her own little drama of struggle, which had been played only a few hours before, probably in the room behind one of those lights, whose needle-point reflections the dark water caught in the starlit stillness. In the woods, which the boat was rapidly

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leaving to the rear, lay the ancient estate of the Gilberts, whence has sailed many an Elizabethan seaman to the exploration of arctic or tropic seas. In this narrow passage of the Dart, less than a quarter of a mile across, she too seemed to be voyaging into unknown seas, the seas of the spirit, stranger even than the arctic wastes. To be alive to-night and herself was as splendid as to be that wonderful Champernoune woman, the mother of men, of Adrian and John Gilbert and of Walter Raleigh, the woman who lives for future ages solely in the light of her marvellous motherhood. These moments in the ferry were to Wilmot somewhat akin to that half-hour of stillness in heaven, of which the mystics tell us, when silence speaks more clearly than sound.

Dr. Borlace, his puck-like temper neither dead nor scotched, watched the gallant lift of her head and the pose with which she accompanied the boat's movement, chuckling inwardly at the test which awaited her at the landing-stage. He guessed how she was, in her usual headlong fashion, keyed to the heroic—and presently to be the victim of a curt command which would remove her from the zone of fire.

As the boat grounded, the great summer moths dashed themselves against the lanthorn held up by a jerseyed figure who stood among the slippery cobbles to haul up the boat. So the human moths flutter against the shining glory of the mock-heroic, either to break the glass of fate and attain a fiery consummation within, or to dash themselves in futile waste of effort outside: such was the doctor's thought.

"I want you," he said in an undertone, turning his back on the men, "to go up to the hill above the village and take charge of the children I've sent there."

"But you're coming to start me, I suppose," she said calmly, "for some will be beyond my knowledge."

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"Oh no; there's no need of me to-night. These are the healthy ones. It's quite safe up there, with good air and water. In fact, we're getting all the water for the whole place from there, till the new supply is in. We've a water-cart from Regiswear hard at work between the hill and the village all the day."

He spoke placidly, yet with a twitch of the lips, for he read her indignation easily. She saw a dog-cart waiting above the steps, and wondered no longer why he had stopped in Challacombe to despatch a telegram.

"I'll not go," she said stormily, "to be sent up there, out of all the trouble. I came here to help you!"

"And you'll be doing it. "One's a baby; you can carry it up with you to-night. It's a bottle-baby and teething, and you'll have the devil's own time with it too. Lungs like leather, and the mother dying."

"And you and that woman will stay down here working together."

He turned on the steps to look down at her upturned face.

"Ay, she'll be useful," he said quietly.

"And I shan't be, you mean. Tony, you're positively insulting. Stop," she cried, as he would have motioned to the driver to draw up close to them.

"Listen to me, Wilmot. You're nervous, highly strung, emotional. You hate squalor and misery. It's all round you here."

She glanced at the open, lighted doorways; in one she thought there was a bed near the door and a mound-like profusion of tumbled linen. Frowsy interiors suggested themselves all up the cobbled lane as far as she could see. The tangled fuchsias and the flower-draped, tumble-down walls seemed to have scraps of household fluff on them. She caught her breath.

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"If you stay here, I shall only have somebody else ill. Up there you can be of the utmost use. I can only spare you a stupid lout of a girl to do the roughest work. They cannot possibly be left to themselves, all those brats. And, what's more, let me tell you—it's either up there, or back to Challacombe for you."

Their eyes locked for a moment.

"Oh, oh, oh," she whispered to herself, as she climbed into the cart. "I've met more than my match at last."

Delight, however, flickered but waveringly in her as a few minutes later she clutched the wailing bundle he handed to her and found herself holding the baby on her left arm, trying at the same time with her right to keep the parcel of groceries on the back seat from slipping down the hill. Truly heroism has its grotesque moments.

The twenty-four hours that followed were a nightmare, for the baby behaved as if he were what nurses call "outlawed." The other children were awake before six in the morning, and the attendant lout declared herself a victim to fits, and, consequently, debarred from active life.

Day after day the only event that broke her monotony was the doctor's daily visit, a haggard, thin-lipped doctor, whose entirely professional manner, and not the best "bed-side" variety at that, alternately piqued and allured his wife. Gradually, however, as she got the undertaking in hand, a new pleasure came to her—the joy of conquest. She even began to rejoice in the growing order and health of her family. Cooking, mending, tubbing, sun-bathing, and the fattening of one miserable anæmic creature, the battle against disorder, disease, and weakness,—all this sent her sleepy to bed at night and got her up bright-eyed in the morning; her own problem shelved till the time when Stoke Michael returned to its normal conditions of life. Wilmot learnt thus what the day's work really means, a

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great uplift for a woman when once she masters it, especially for a woman whose temperament permits her to live entirely within the narrow circle of the present and its interests.

Unknown to herself, Dr. Borlace watched her, soon learning that he had made an excellent job of this new version of the "Taming of the Shrew," this calming of the neurotic, which is the modern analogue of that almost prehistoric human situation. Sternly he forbade a repetition of the one visit she made to the village, quietly he settled the diet of her one patient; and the proudest moment to Wilmot's pacified soul was when the patent food he had ordered her to administer proved manifestly unsuitable, and they had to return to the one she had been forbidden to use. In her after-thoughts of the time, it was the only triumph that she could remember as scoring to her side.

In the daily work, to which she went with tense nerves and quickened brain, Wilmot became physically less attractive. She seemed already less graciously rounded, and as her voice gained in incisiveness, it lost its haunting velvety softness; as her hands became useful, they grew lean and fuller of grip. Daily she seemed to be watching the siren dying in her and the woman, fit to match a plain man in both senses of the word, rising to the surface. Mobile and sensitive her face had always been, but now it began to be sharpened with the graving tooth of the intellect, which is to human faces a more wonder-working sculptor than Pygmalion himself.

Day after day the scorching blaze of burning sunlight beat down on the hills, followed by the glory of the harvest moon at night, till there seemed no possible cessation of this eternal stimulus of light. People began at last to watch the skies for the shadow of a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. None came, even when the moon was

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waning, and with the nights there gathered darkness, indeed, but no cloud. On the moors, even in valleys where the constant freshets spring, nothing grew but dried moss, on which the lean ponies tried to graze, till with their gaunt flanks hollowed to the bone, they died by the dozen. Springs never before known to cease dried everywhere, and, to a people accustomed to lush dampness as their characteristic habitat, the time was portentous, till the red dews that appeared in places were counted star-borne or earthquake-carried.

As the fevered earth grew parched the strain of contest began once more between Wilmot and the doctor, but the quality of the strife was changed; it became more elemental than intellectual, more a conflict of their two wills than of their two minds. The physical activity of the past weeks, which had made Wilmot more of a woman, had touched her to singular issues. The man she had despised was a man who loved her, who satisfied her and yet stood aloof: to the woman whom Roger Hannaford had awakened this was enough. To the doctor the strain became intolerable; the irritating, nerve-racking consciousness of her nearness drove him to a rage that scarcely permitted civil speech. Consequently he kept himself well within the circle of the village, which was out of bounds for her, and thus ceased to see her at all.

At last, after the gathering of the thunder and the tropic rain that followed, came the autumn frosts and the passing of the sickness. Soon a few extra mounds in the churchyard above the plum orchards, and new stand-pipes in the village street, would be all that remained to mark the battlefield where Dr. Tony had fought, not ungallantly.

One day at last, as a child held up to Wilmot on its grubby palm the first acorn in its cup, Wilmot knew that the time of her probation—and his—was over. The clean

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smell of nuts and of the leaves on the verge of their sereness filled her nostrils, passing over her senses like the cool translucence of a wave that catches a swimmer.

That night she wrapped herself in a short fur coat and slipped out of the cottage into the chill, bluish mist. She was trembling with life, like the flower which turns to the sun's kiss and the bee's rifting. She had not seen the doctor for a week, but they told her he looked ill: he too, she thought, must be worn by this strange life of theirs. The idea rejoiced her, though the next moment her pleasure was dashed by a recollection of his frequent nights of watching. By now Dr. Tony was an object of idolatry in Stoke Michael, and woman after woman, when she fetched away her children from Wilmot's care, had a tale to tell of wonderful cures when every nerve had been strained to save.

There was no knocker on the door of the cottage where the doctor lived, and Wilmot's first faint rapping was unheard. The house, too, was in darkness, but at last she heard the spurt of a match, and Dr. Borlace himself came to the door. As he drew her into the house, she exclaimed at his ice-cold hand; but the feeling was a pleasure, for had she not come to bring warmth and comfort?

"Oh, what a frog it is!" she said, tracing out the lines between his eyes with a shaking forefinger. "Now, you're not to say a word. You've been obeyed only too long, sir, for your own good."

The next minute she had picked up the matches and was kneeling before the grate, setting a light to the fire there. With puffed-out, cherub cheeks she blew at the flame she had kindled.

"You needn't do that," he said with a shaken laugh, "we use fire-lighters in this house."

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They both laughed together, for at Dashpers the matter of fire-lighters had been a lively source of dispute, since Johanna considered them wasteful. Then the laugh suddenly ceased, for Johanna touched tragedy for both of them. At last the fire glowed brightly, and the curtains were closed. The friendliness of a joint fireside wrapped away from their memory all that had intervened since they shared one together.

"Tony," she said, sitting at his feet on the old patchwork rug, "haven't I been good?"

He could see her breast heaving and her breath catching as she leant forward against his knee. He covered his face with his hand from the blaze of fire and of eyes, wearied as he was with inward struggle. For the season of the dropping acorn, which to her had meant the beginning, to him meant the end.

"It's been a blessed discipline for you, child," he said lightly. "I flatter myself I've made a new woman of you. And for me, it's been a good fight," he continued in another tone, with grateful memories of that exercise of proven skill which stands among the finest satisfactions of life.

"And now," he went on steadily, "it's all over, and we've to face the future."

"Yours and mine, Tony."

"Yours—and mine," he said, with a long pause between the words. "I shall be gone from here in a week or so."

"And it's wiped out Challacombe."

"Ay, so be it. It's wiped out Challacombe, perhaps," he said, rising and standing to look at the fire, since her eyes questioned too closely for calmness.

"But it's not wiped out other things," he said softly.

She rose slowly, leaning on one knee for a second, as if in pain.



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"What I did, Tony, do you mean?"

"What I am and what you are, child. That's a better way to put it. We're facing the music now."

"I'm ready," she said, pulling herself together.

"Well, it seems to me there are two courses open to us. Either you go and I give you your liberty; you shall have it freely. Wait a minute," he said, putting out a hand to silence her. "Hear me out first. You were married under false pretences, and your freedom is your right. Go, and as quickly as the courts can do it, you shall have your liberty."

He could not bring himself to mention how she must go to secure that liberty. Nor did he need to do so.

"And the other course?"

"Oh," he said, with a shrug, "it's to come with me, I suppose."

"That's simple, of course," she mocked.

"If you come with me, I must go abroad. I've heard of a practice in the far west of Canada. It'll be a hard life for you; far from women, and farther still from books and other things that mean so much to you, Wilmot. On the other hand, if—I go alone, I shall not try even for so much of a practice as that, I shall go as surgeon on a liner. I can get a post easily, for I know several men who've influence in that way. You see, I'm very poor, and there isn't money for anything else, even if I were fitted for it. And rough-and-tumble suits me best, after all. I'll get bow-windowed and gross with too much ease."

She laughed as she looked at the loosely hanging clothes and lined face.

"All this is plain-sailing business," she said, eyeing him narrowly.

"Ay, I'm best at that," he agreed.

"And it might be the future of a complete stranger

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you're arranging. If I come, well—so and so. If I go, well—thus and thus," she gesticulated. "Is that all the difference I make to you, just that between a liner and the Far West?"

"I prefer not to go any more into that matter."

"And I prefer that we shall. No, I'm more to you than that. And you deliberately propose to throw me away, into what the melodramas call sin and Mrs. Grundy punishes."

"To a man of my mind there is neither sin in the world, nor rewards, nor punishments."

"Only," she said defiantly, "consequences, far more awful than rewards or punishments, and a power of creating the future, that is far more effective than sin. That's your creed, Tony, a harder one than any thunder from Mount Sinai."

"And if so," he shrugged, "who am I to say which creative act shall bring more of good or evil in its train in the endless succession of years?"

"Ah," she said, with a gesture of rejection, "let it be, this sophistry. It is our lives that matter—our lives. What can we tell of the future we are making, or the past we come from? You and I, Tony, for all we can tell, may have travelled through the ages to complete ourselves in one another. And now, through the blindness of a moment's yea or nay, may be undoing the work of centuries of struggle."

She seemed to herself to be pleading for the unseen lives that waited.

"Oh, spare me," he said, with a shrug. "I am congenitally incapable of seeing more than just what lies under my nose—that is, just you, another and myself, who can at most but move you to pity."

"Pity," she said, coming up to him. "Is this pity, then?"

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He could feel her cheek close to his, and as his arm involuntarily caught her, she slipped his other cold hand under the fur at her breast, till the heart it rested on shook his pulses into burning life.

But in this very storm that moved him there lurked the agony to sting him to resistance, a spiritual *angina pectoris*.

"No," he said hoarsely, tearing her hands away from him, "this only tells me—what I haven't dared to think of. I never awoke this in you. I was never man enough for that. It's all his, or it all ought to be. And, after all, I'm too big a man to take your womanhood; I, who was never man enough to wake it."

For a second after the door had closed behind her he suffered the agony of mere sensation, devoid of conscious thought. The next moment thought helped, for how could he, in sheer manliness, take advantage of an emotion, part pity, part repentance, part the mere woman's instinct for the fulfilment of her life? This impulse of life to life was not of his gaining, and in the bitterness of pride he refused what another had aroused. No winged victory this, though in part the victory he had striven for; but a crawling figure, blind and wingless, that crouched in the darkness of distrust. After a time he was able to savour the strangeness of his rejection, that in the union of blood and fire he could refuse, for the sake of an ideal of perfect conquest, the thing for which he had played. The man who had roused the sleeping life in Wilmot alone matched her. For although the great city stands where men think lightly of the laws, yet that is only because a far deeper power than mere law binds the inhabitants of it, those same "acts and consequences" the right comprehension of which makes all laws needless.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE GOD FROM THE MACHINE

DEEPER into the wood pass the feet of lovers as the life of passion waxes ; deeper into the wood the wounded animal drags itself with weary, limping steps ; the throbbing heart-aches of life or death pant themselves away in places secret as the depths from which they come.

In the autumn night the beards of lichen waved from the tall straight firs in the dim blue greyness of the plantation above Stoke Michael, like a mockery of age amid eternal youth. Through the lichen and the trees filtered a mist of rain that distilled gently and persistently in a shower on the mouldy freshness of the undergrowth. Patter, patter on the barren bramble-bushes fell the raindrops, till they made a tune in the ears of the woman, who lay in tense and quivering silence, face downward, on a bare patch among the bushes. "Never, never," said the rustling drops, till she asked herself, "Never what?" She knew well enough, however, for all the while the wood was not present to her, but she saw the firelight flashing on cottage rafters and cracked mirror, till the polished surface leered at her through the gloom.

Johanna had travelled a long way since the days when ostrich feathers and an "honest" status wherewith to confound a rival had been the motive force of struggle, the prize of conflict. Long ago she had taken the step from outward to inward desire of purity, from the waving of feathers to the cleanliness of life. But the way up is a matter of ever-opening vistas, and to-night, in face of Dr.

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Borlace's demand upon her nobility, she was called upon to rise into the conception of a world of self-conquest, foreign to any she had known before.

The virtues are often but matters of social standard, and in Johanna's class the poles round which the moral world revolves are, in women, chastity and cleanliness; in men, courage and honesty, in the sense of restraint from picking and stealing. The other virtues had scarcely so much as presented themselves to her fancy, yet now she was asked to conquer the mean sordidness of the heart, as she had already beaten down the dominion of the flesh. For in the world of mental mastery, as in the curriculum of the Schoolmen, each scholar has to pass through the trivium, or threefold course, to master the strength of the flesh, the selfishness of the heart, and, most difficult of all, the narrowness of the mind, that so often shuts in the righteous to the narrowest self-culture, and thus leaves the wider work of life to the spiritually blind; for nothing is so baffling in the world's history as the mental limitations and narrow vision of the elect. Before each step in the soul's progress lies, in short, a deep pit, and it was on the brink of the first of these pits that Johanna halted.

Dr. Borlace's search for a way out of his difficulties had not been a long one; the way came, indeed, with the suddenness of a figure emerging from mist. It was not one that he himself would have chosen, but easy to a tired man, who was already suffering the sudden stabs of pain that are a prelude to pneumonia. Just a few "through draughts" and wet clothes once or twice left unchanged, and it all came about quite comfortably. This was Johanna's great hour, as, almost cheerfully, she thrust aside every offer of help and set herself to the task of nursing him, lying bravely to all inquirers who would have it that the case was desperate. By these lies his wife was kept away, which

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would have been impossible, had the fact of the really serious nature of her husband's illness become a matter of common knowledge.

But now at last Johanna had promised Dr. Bartlett to fetch Wilmot, and for the last hour or so the silent contest had gone on between her patient's pleading eyes and her will. How could she give up the last few hours of him that were all she would ever be able to call her own? And it was easy enough to refuse, for she would swear that Wilmot would not come when asked; oath for oath, it was Johanna who would be believed, not Wilmot, for no one knew that his wife had even so much as once visited the doctor in Stoke Michael.

In the stress of temptation Johanna shut herself up in the room below her patient's, and there her great strength broke for the moment, till she bit her nails to the quick. The woman who did the rough work of the cottage, opening the door suddenly, was sworn at. For to Johanna and her like gentleness and truthfulness are exotic virtues, ornaments for the quality, and the "honest women" whom she envied often shout shrewishly at home and find nothing so easy as lying. From the house she went to the wood. Once there, it was not of lies, or truth, or of kindness that she thought: it was only of the doctor's eyes that demanded all she could give. The eyes won.

Quite gently she went to Wilmot, speaking like a woman hypnotized, to carry the message that Dr. Borlace wanted his wife, and that there must be no time lost if she wished to see him alive. Swiftly and efficiently Johanna took up the direction of affairs, packing a bag for her mistress, in which nothing was forgotten, not even the sleeping draught which Wilmot was in the habit of using. Next she caught up the blue house-dress that had been once the doctor's favourite. It was getting shabby, but Johanna

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felt quite in luck at discovering it behind the door, for was she not preparing the completest treat she could imagine for the big child down in the village? She stooped to pull the skirt straight, and then began to arrange the lace at the sleeve when the bodice was once adjusted.

"Why in the world, Johanna, are you fussing about this now?" asked Wilmot, querulously.

"Don't you know by this time," flashed Johanna, "that if cutting the heart out of either of us would do him a mite of good, I'd do it?"

Such splendour of gold and purple, of blue and russet, faced the two women as they came out from the cottage on the hill, that the mockery of it dazzled their eyes. Beyond the gleam of the river and the glory of the trees the hills were red with the newly turned earth, and purple in the fields not tilled so lately, for this is the red-earth land that leaves behind the ploughshare sweeps of satin, blood-red with the sheen of moisture. After the soft showers of an hour ago, the north wind had swept the sky steel-blue. There was health and sweet savour in it all, even in the very rush of hill-water that came from the standpipe in the road, when a woman turned the handle. Death or no death, her husband's generalship had won. Wilmot counted jealously, as a miser his sources of gain, the few deaths, the clean future for the unborn children.

Once in the doctor's cottage, the colour and health outside passed from her mind, and in the low-ceiled room dread waited for her. Johanna remained upstairs for a long time, while Wilmot paced up and down, locking and interlocking her hands as she waited.

"What is it?" she asked, as Johanna at last appeared. "Can't I go to him?"

"Oh," said Johanna, "it was only something that had to be done."

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In reality, the doctor had insisted on being shaved, lest his appearance should shock his dainty wife; but Johanna, who understood his reason well enough, would have died rather than confess it to Wilmot.

"Now," said Johanna, as they stood together in the dark landing outside his room, "let 'un die believing in 'ee. Play the part he wants 'ee to play, as if you'd never had another thought in your head. 'Tis the last you can do for 'en."

The woman's intensity carried Wilmot over the threshold, and as the darkness passed from her she saw nothing but his quizzical eyes. Then she knew that, dying or not, nothing but the bare truth would suffice.

"So Johanna's brought you," he said, holding out a hand for a friendly shake, "both of you disobeying orders, you know. But it's safe enough for you down here now. Johanna's been very good; she's given me all the oper windows I wanted."

"Too many for 'ee, I reckon," said Johanna, turning away to leave the room. She left the door of the room ajar behind her, but at first Wilmot never noticed it.

"I told her fresh air was the chief thing for a pneumonia patient"—he chuckled—"and she believed it, till Bartlett came and started a bronchitis kettle instead of a constant draught."

"Tony," said Wilmot, "I want to say something."

"Yes."

"It's that I've been watching a strong man these last weeks in Stoke Michael. You've been the strong man, Tony. Do you understand?"

"A certificate for Peter, up there"—he tried to laugh. "I'll present it when I see him."

"And you've made me obey you. I wanted that. You gave me too much liberty."



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But he was not able to heed much. "A strong man," she heard him say under his breath, savouring the rhythm of it.

The door to the side moved, and Wilmot knew then that Johanna was behind it. She could, in fact, see the outline of a crouching form outside. Somehow it seemed natural enough for Johanna to be close by, as she had been all through.

Wilmot slipped an arm under his neck to give him brandy. As she did so, he said, opening his eyes—

"I should have told you about Johanna, how I asked her——"

"I know," said Wilmot, quickly, hating the words. "She told me."

The woman in the doorway put her hand to the fastenings at her throat, for they seemed stifling.

"Throw something more over me," he said at last. "I used to have feet at the end of my legs, but you wouldn't know it now."

"This will settle it for you," he went on, after a pause. "And there'll be other children. You were made for 'em. That's why you went wrong. But I wasn't man enough."

Slowly the darkness began to fill the room as the two women waited.

"Love to Avis," he asked, "if there's any 'up there'? There's mighty queer things here. I've learnt that, anyway; so, maybe, there is an 'up there.'"

Wilmot wondered if this were not a creed worthy of a place by the more pedantic confessions of faith.

"Is he a good chap?" he asked suddenly.

"Listen, Tony," she said, in a frantic passion to get nearer to the mystery of this wandering mind; "it's you, not him, that I want. Take that with you into the Great Perhaps, if that's where you're going."

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In her frenzy her lips clung to his, as if she would have breathed the power of her very life into his veins, in proof of the truth of her words. He sank from her touch into the depths of unconsciousness, either of sleep or of coming death, she could not tell which. Yet into one or the other she knew he must carry from her touch a rose of fire from the central heart of things.

At last the door was opened quietly, and Johanna came in with a carefully shaded light. Then, holding her hand in front of the flame so that it should not fall on the sleeper's face, she caught her breath with a gasp.

Wilmot rose and slipped noiselessly away, followed by Johanna.

"What is it? Death?" she said, shutting the door behind them. "I daren't look."

"No, it's life," said Johanna, "and you've given it. For all I did was naught. I couldn't keep 'em here, and one little word from you did it."

"Johanna," said Wilmot, catching the other's arm, as she would have pushed towards the closed door with a noisy movement, "think what are you going to do? If you burst in there you'll wake him—and kill him."

The two women faced one another breathlessly, while Wilmot set her back to the door and measured the strength of her opponent.

"And that's what I mean to do."

"No, no. You're mad for the moment. 'Twas you that came for me only an hour ago. You that said you'd cut the heart out of either of us, if it would do him any good."

"I reckon 'twas your heart I meant," scoffed Johanna, keeping her voice in the low tense tones they had both been using. "I thought he'd be mine sometime," said she, in a strange new tone. "I thought I'd have 'em dead

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if I couldn't have 'en alive." Then she turned away, and Wilmot drew a deep sigh of relief as she heard her slow footsteps going down the stairs.

Leaning at the foot of the staircase, Johanna twisted her hands round the rail. "And I sent 'en away from me for this—I that might have had 'en." The passions of the moment twisted her body as they did her heart. Wrapping herself in the old cloak she kept hanging on a peg in the passage, she stepped across the threshold into the road. Her dark figure showed for a second against a brightly lit cottage door, and then the moonlit dusk swallowed her up. Somehow the night passed, and the light returned in time.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, Dinah, the moon is up,  
The stars are shining bright.  
Oh, meet me by the cocoanut tree,  
For you're my heart's delight."

Sung in a curious throaty treble next morning, the sounds floated up the well staircase that led straight from Johanna's room on the ground-floor to her bedroom, a mere rail cutting off the end of the upper room from the stairs. The song, which seemed to come from the fireplace below, awoke the sleeper, who lifted herself on her elbow to listen. She knew the voice, for it belonged to Polly Revel, who lived in the other half of the cottage with her shifty family, and who was evidently lighting the fire for her neighbour.

Leaning on her elbow, Johanna tried to recall how last night had ended; but it was all a black doubt, of which she could remember only the beginning—the draining of glass after glass of whisky, the dropping across the table downstairs, and the crash of glass that followed. It was not shame at all that flashed in her now, across her aching forehead and bitter heart, but a great rage at not having secured a longer respite; for, like most women, Johanna

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scarcely understood the masculine weakness of convivial drinking—to her it was an opiate in bodily or mental pain. Now it had failed her, and she lay watching the shimmer of dew in the fields outside, the shadows between the trees, and the shafts of misty sunlight. The pain of the moment was in the contrast between this awakening and that, the sordid failure within and the cold perfection without. But the fancy passed lightly away, and the real pain began, like the true birth-pangs that follow the false. For now she must go back to the willing renunciation in which she had acquiesced on the night she left Challacombe—the same renunciation that last night she had rejected. She had to adjust herself once more to a narrowing of desire.

The best women have ingrained in their nature the need to serve; no misery to a woman can equal the consciousness that comes to her when she believes that no one in the world calls on her for help. Flung roughly aside from her service of Dr. Borlace, hopelessly outshined by another woman, Johanna sought violently for a way in which she could feel some human call on her. To a woman of her past, but one way could present itself: since the highest way of help was denied, there could remain but the lowest. It must be Challacombe again, and the old life once more.

“Run, there’s a poppet, a mammy’s treasure,” came a cheerful voice from the stairs. “If you don’t look sharp, Polly’ll catch your fat legs.”

Above the head of the stairs, heralded by thumps, there appeared a fluffy head, a waddling tub-like body, clad in a short shift, and finally two legs, indifferent bandy. With a shriek of delight Elizabeth flew across the room.

“Eh, my dear soul, you do look bad, sure ’nuff,” said Polly, following Elizabeth. “Mortal queer you was last night, too.”

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But Johanna paid no heed to her at all, as she held the shouting child tightly to her bare breast. She was stifling her with hard kisses, winding the little soft yielding limbs round her body, while the creature laughed and struggled and shouted, red and panting. At last the mother felt the impress of the tiny teeth, kitten-like, in her flesh, and shivered with the ecstatic agony of the moment. She had forgotten the child last night, but now it came back how Elizabeth had been the last to leave the hospital on the hill, and how Polly had promised to look after her.

Polly was the kind of woman, very well known in villages, who loves to sit scratching her elbows. She was doing so at this very moment as she settled herself for a comfortable gossip on the side of the bed. The elbow-scratching habit marks a distinct type, the easy-going soul who never boggles over an hour or two late, or a room in confusion, or a child half dressed. They must be in all classes, these women, though what they do in ranks where elbow-scratching is not known, it is difficult to say. For the rest, Polly overflowed from her garments in the jolly fashion that reminds one of the good-natured overflow of exuberant foam from a bottle of beer.

She watched the struggles of Elizabeth with a gap-toothed grin, for she had lost one tooth in front, and her red lips sucked, dingle-like, into the cavity so left.

"My word," she said at last, "she's as strong as a pig in acorn-time."

Johanna loosed the child, who instantly began to zigzag across the patchwork quilt to the window-sill, where she curled in the sunlight, calling, "Mamy, Mamy," at every fly that, with carefully licked finger, she pursued on the pane. For the comfort of humanitarians, it should be noted that, autumn as it was, and chill, the flies were too cute for Elizabeth, and eluded her every time.

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"And I forgot all about her last night," said Johanna, lying back. "Oh, Polly, my head's splitting."

"I've the kettle on," answered Polly, "for, said I, 'Mrs. Buckingham 'll have more'n one head upon her shoulders this morning.' Eh, my good Lord, I tell 'ee what you want, and I do wish you had it. That's a chap. It makes 'ee feel all-overish to have one, and you go about your work quite soft-like and shivery, and you'm not the same being without one. My, I wish you had one, Mrs. Buckingham."

"I've had but too many, I reckon, Polly."

"Oh, you mean the child," said the frank and easy Polly. "Well, time and again the chillern will come, and you can't help it. 'Tis the Lord's will, I reckon."

"I never forgot her before," said Johanna, half to herself, "but the woman that nursed her for me once did. And the lil' maid got up that Christmas morning, 'cause I'd told her there'd be something in her stocking as she'd like. But the woman hadn't put in the things I'd told her to. And the poppet, she'd to go back to bed and feel that nobody'd thought of her, that they'd all forgotten her. I can see the bright peepers of her now filling wi' sad little tears."

This vision of an unloved child was the most vivid thought in Johanna's mind. This she foresaw as Elizabeth's fate, to have just the careless kindness of indifferent strangers. She turned to the wall, away from Polly's quick eyes, at the thought of that empty stocking and crestfallen face. It became typical of what would happen to "poppet" if her mother went back to the old ways.

"Iss, fay," said Polly, vaguely, "they bring their love with 'em. Don't 'ee, my handsome? But I was going to tell you, Mrs. Buckingham, how I've got a new chap, and don't walk with Onesimus Perrett no more. We'd had

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words, and one night he come to the door and held out my picture that I'd given him. 'There,' says he, holding out the packet and looking up the lane away from the hand he held out. 'Wait a bit,' says I, and fetches his picture. 'There,' says I, same as he did to me. And that's the last I seed of him. I suppose I'll never walk with 'en again."

The tea that awaited Johanna when she came downstairs with Elizabeth on her arm was distinctly weak and smoky, but she drank it feverishly, while Polly watched her with something savage and restless in her glance, that awoke the elder woman to the fact that a thought was seriously troubling Polly's usual gay inconsequence.

Resting her aching head on her hand, she watched the girl finishing Elizabeth's long-neglected robing.

"What's the matter, Polly?" she said at last. "You'll get a place soon enough, I'll warn, a tidy sort of a maid like you."

"Eh, 'tisan't that, Mrs. Buckingham. I've been out of a place times upon times, and mother she never says a word o' that. Mother isn't one to worrit."

Mrs. Revel belonged also, as Johanna knew, to the inconsequent elbow-scratching race, to whom conduct is three-parts luck and the remaining part "the Lord's will."

"Then what is it, cheeld? For there is something, I'm sure."

"Then it's Onesimus, Mrs. Buckingham. For all I speak light, I love 'en dearly, and I don't care a flip of my tongue for the squinny-eyed toad I walk with now. Oh, my days, don't 'ee say another word about either of 'em. I wish I'd never been born."

Bursting into a sob, she began to rock herself to and fro. Elizabeth occupied herself, unnoticed by either, in taking the reels from her mother's box and rolling them along the floor. To the accompanying coo, coo of the

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child's contentment, varied by peals of kisses on the rag-doll that Wilmot had given her, Polly told her story. As she spoke, and the little window behind them began to darken with a rain-squall, Johanna heard another call for help, beside Poppet's simple need. For, with this older woman, whose strife she guessed at, the barriers between the generations went down, and Polly got down to the black horror that, as a rule, young girls fight alone, for there is no human gulf so hard to bridge as that between the girl and the woman. So the younger has to fight unaided where the struggle is most desperate. As Polly talked on, Johanna saw the meaning of her reckless lightness.

"You see," said Polly, in a choked voice, "I thought I was the first to Onesimus, same as he was to me, and I'd never so much as let another chap touch me. For there's light maids down here too, but I wasn't never one. There's bad girls here, and one of 'em told on Onesimus. I gave her the lie. But when I saw his face I knowed 'twas truth her said. Eh, my dear soul, to see the half-shamefaced, half-boastful look on 'en. I dunno how to say it. And they'm all like Onesimus too, and by side of some of 'em he's a lily, a proper lily."

It was all clear to Johanna—the child's quickly come, precocious knowledge, the blackening of the sweetest things, the ever-dogging mystery of the ages, the toad within the rock of man's nature. Face to face with this trouble, Johanna understood, as many another far better woman would not have done, for the good women forget so quickly their own youth, shrink in such horror from the other side of brightness. But Johanna knew what would help: in a moment's flash, her own heart-sickness forgotten, she was ready.

She spoke first of herself, that the last barrier might go down between them.



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"Polly," she said, slowly beating sleepy Poppet's hand up and down in the movement she always used to comfort the weaker, "I'm not Mrs. Buckingham, you know. My father turned me into the street before I was sixteen—to get my own living. My dear, I've been in hell," she said, unconsciously recalling the great Florentine, "and Poppet come to me there. Right down in hell Poppet come," she repeated.

Polly left off sobbing, and watched her with round, awe-stricken eyes.

"And I know," said Johanna, firmly, "more'n you'll ever know, my dear, of what blackens the very blessed sunlight itself. And I've thought and I've thought upon it, and there's help, cheeld. 'Tisn't all as black, not by half, as it looks."

Polly caught her breath, as one who sees a sudden beacon-flame, while Johanna's thoughts crackled like summer lightning on a far-off horizon.

"To a maid when she knows what's in a man 'tis all black rottenness in him and her and everybody. There's no good at all in any man-jack of 'em, least of all in her own man, to her thinking. 'Tis so, isn't it, cheeld?"

"Iss, fay, 'tis," nodded Polly.

"And that's where she's all wrong," said Johanna, quietly, "and that I know, for I've seen it. I've seen three men knowingly go to their almost certain death, to save a parcel o' little brats that didn't belong to 'em, and they three a deal worse'n your man. And that isn't all; I've seen 'em, the men that's black as ink in one way, gentle and patient for years upon years with a bed-ridden mother or a totelin old father. Eh, my dear, they'm not all of a piece, same as you think 'em. And in the best there's summat to forgive and set to the back of 'ee." She stopped, for "even of the best" it was true, and the pity of it stopped her eloquence.

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"But 'tisin't the same. Never again the same."

"'Tisin't, and that's a true word. But I dunno as 'tisin't the tenderer, for all that, when you'm older and got used to 'em. For they'm just like bad chillern, that twist your heart for 'ee time and again, and that you bore with the bitterest pain o' this here earth."

"But Onesimus? He come along, tother night here, to ask me to take 'en back."

"Ay, that's another matter. For what you've to look to is, not Onesimus by hisself; that's plain enough, for if Onesimus be all the world to 'ee, take 'en, for they'm all Onesimuses or worse, come to that. Solomons they be, and Solomons they will be, lest they'm kept safe. But there's often more than the man to suffer, and that's the woman and cheeld."

"There isn't here," said Polly, "that I know of."

"Then take 'en back. For you've got to save 'en from hisself. And when there's more women than *be* women, and that don't turn from the blackest pit of all as if they was tail-piped dogs, it's my belief it'll be less easy for the men to tumble in."

Next day Johanna paid her rent for the little house, leaving her few possessions in charge of the Revels, and set out for Challacombe. Dr. Borlace had turned the corner, and there was no longer any danger; but Johanna could not bear to stay any longer where everything so forcibly brought to mind the fretful happiness of the last weeks. It was the instinct of the homeless dog that, driven away from his old haunts, still tries to return to them, that sent Johanna to Challacombe. Nor would she have so returned, had not Polly's case put her in a new mind. For, somehow, the small measure of understanding that she had brought to Polly had given her a new power, something unlike any force she had ever felt in herself before. For it

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seemed that she had been strength to another's weakness in a way which would have been impossible to her but for the road she had trodden. Poppet's needs were simple, Polly's complex: in both Johanna had tasted the satisfaction of her thirst to find some human soul dependent on her. The memory of Polly helped to wipe out the sight of the sleeping man brought back to life by another hand than hers, and by a love which she rightly felt to be incomparably weaker than her own.

Tramping along from the ferry to Challacombe, with the heavy child on her back and her small bundle of needments on her arm, her heart lightened, even in her weariness, at the feel of the fat little neck against hers, and the freedom of the long white road. The sun and the wind, the conquest, the upward way, were all summed up in the token of victory she carried, the child on her back, won by cruel pain, and the more precious for the bitter struggle, both physical and moral. On the crest of the hill she leant against the hedge for a moment to watch the scene in front of her—the line of white gulls that fluttered above a red furrow, the slate roofs, grey in the afternoon shadows, and the red-brown sails, from which she could hear in fancy the cluck-cluck of the water as they heaved up and down in the bay. Suddenly a voice at her elbow startled her—

"Johanna Buckingham, or I'm much mistaken." It was Captain Penrice who had come to her, his footsteps scarce sounding on the litter of fallen leaves.

"I've been wanting to see you," he said, taking her bundle from her and falling into step with her. "I've had you on my mind a good bit, and so has the missus. You and the doctor, poor chap, have done a good day's work over at Stoke Michael, that you have. I hope they paid 'ee a nurse's wages."

"Yes, they did, but I vamped it to-day, for I'm bound

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to think o' the future, and I'm as strong as a horse. He's getting well is the doctor."

"And they'll be going over seas, as soon as he's strong enough, they tell me," said Captain Penrice, in a matter-of-fact manner.

"So I've heard tell," said Johanna, matching his tone admirably.

"And now," he said, after the long silence with which they had descended the hill, "now, you'll come in to rest at a friend's house. The missus'll never forgive me else. She's been wanting to see 'ee for weeks." He held open the gate for her as he spoke, but her eyes were fixed on Dashpers, its windows begrimed already, and its garden with notice-boards of "To Let."

"I didn't look for it, sir," she said, shrinking.

"But I did," he said quietly.

She followed in silence as he led her in.

"Hardly a day passes but what the missus talks of 'ee," he said, opening the door of the sitting-room for her as she lifted Elizabeth, round-eyed and wondering, up the steps.

Mrs. Penrice's welcome was even kinder, as she led the two travellers upstairs. The captain noticed tear-stains on his wife's face when she came down at his shout, to infuse the tea.

"There, old lass," said the captain, lifting her off her feet with a hug. "We'll talk to Johanna about it when they've had some victuals. It's bad talking o' changes when you'm ill-lined inside."

After their meal, the captain sat by the lamp, feeding Elizabeth as she sat on his knee with small pieces of carefully skinned "egg plums," which were the crown of the feast for her. Johanna watched the two heads close together, the square white one and the nut-coloured round

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head of the little maid, who zestfully licked his big fingers and her own tiny ones.

"The missus and I have a bit of a plan, Johanna," he said, looking up suddenly from the child and raising her higher on his knee. "You see, we're both dearly fond of a little one, and having none of our own—well, we'd like to adopt one. That's the long and the short of it. She'll have all there is to leave when we're gone, and I needn't tell you she'd be dearly cherished."

He glanced at his wife, who sat with tightly clasped hands away from the lamp-lit circle.

"Will 'ee give us this one, my dear?"

"You've done a cruel thing, cap'en, and a thing I never thought you'd ha' done," said Johanna at last.

"That's just what I said too," burst in Mrs. Penrice, unable to keep silence any longer. "For she's sure to feel that she'd—maybe be standing in the child's light, if she didn't let us have her."

"No," said Johanna, defiantly, "that's not what I feel at all. I don't deny as she'd feed better, lie softer than with me. But with me she'll be living the life her come to live a-purpose. Her come out o' the pit to help, and her'll stay to help where her was sent. And you couldn't give her more love than I can. No, sir, take a cheeld that's missing the love that ought to be hers. There's a mort of 'em here, God knows, that haven't got what Poppet has. Take one of them."

"You're right, Johanna," said Mrs. Penrice.

"But stop a bit," said the captain, as Johanna would have risen. "You haven't heard the half of what I had to say, which was this. How are you going to get a living?"

"I went to Stoke Michael for the laundry work, but it's shut down for the time," said Johanna, wearily, "and I haven't enough money to do what I've a mind to do."

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"What's that?"

"Start a little shop, a tiddlewink shop for groceries, sweeties, and that, with calico and reels. The old woman's dead that had it, died a month ago, and there's nowhere nearer'n Regiswear for so much as a penn'th of blue or a packet o' tea."

"Then, here's where I come in," said the captain, "for I owe you a helping hand, that's a sure thing. And if there's any one wants to be helped, it's you."

"And besides, if it's a woman that needs a helping hand, you're always the one to give it," said his wife, proudly. If ever a woman spoiled her husband, Mrs. Penrice did, with one reservation, due to her jealousy of his love for Wilmot.

"That's neither here nor there," said the captain, testily, for he was rather "full up" occasionally, as Dr. Tony would have said, with wifely laudation. "The long and the short of the matter is, that my niece owes you a big debt, and I'm minded to pay it for her. And I'll stock your shop for you, and willing."

"No," said Johanna, rising and pushing back her chair, "what I done I done for the love of 'en, not for money nor wages."

"I know, I know, my dear," said the captain, deprecatingly. "Then I'll put it another way. I'll put so much capital into the shop, and you shall pay me, as regularly as if I was a money-lender, the interest on it. There, you proud-faced minx, will that suit 'ee?"

"How much per cent.?" said doubting Johanna.

"Honest market-rate—four per cent., if you like; but a more unbelieving Thomas than you don't crawl," shouted he.

But Johanna was lost in calculations. "And I shall want a sewing machine," she said reflectively, "for I've a mind to set up dressmaking too. I didn't like leaving

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Elizabeth all day for the laundry work either, for though the neighbours be kind enough, they'd get stuffing her up with all sorts of old trade when I wasn't by to look after her."

At that moment Nero, the captain's retriever, began to bark furiously in the yard, as he always did when William left for home in the evening.

"Poppet on a hat and out and see a wow-wow," cried Elizabeth, struggling to get free, so that the rolls of fat on her neck waved like a field of barley in the wind.

Now, Elizabeth was naturally a taciturn child, and her conversational efforts were, therefore, always regarded in the light of masterpieces. The three adults hurried to obey her commands, Mrs. Penrice rushing away for the child's hat and jacket.

"You'll do what I say, Johanna?" said the captain, jumping Elizabeth in the air.

So, to the accompaniment of Poppet's screams of joy, Johanna was settled in life. She knew the tiddlewink shop would be a success, for "Mrs. Buckingham" had helped most houses in Stoke Michael in their hour of need, and the village was not overpoweringly Pharisaic in its attitude to anybody's past. For Stoke Michael, as a whole, followed the aphorism, "I speak as I find," being thus wiser in its generation than many children of a wider light.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### VALLEY SHADOWS

"THE beds be plum, the victuals up to the knocker, and missus's hand as light as a gal's, saving a little heaviness with the pepper-pot," said Heber, giving Tryphena a testimonial of efficiency; "but missus's tongue would curdle the very innerds of an old he-goat. 'Tis more'n mortal man can stomach. Though I commend the feelings of a faymale that knows when her's been well-suited."

It was just at the pleasant time of barley-harvest in the summer of the following year. Standing in the lane outside the farm-steading of Chittleford, Robert Hannaford and Heber faced the field. A south wind was tossing the myriad bearded heads so that none were ever motionless or upright for a moment, but bowing, twisting, swaying and fluttering, their stems offered an untrustworthy support to the white convolvulus that clung to them. For a moment, as the field gave its full-toned susurrus, called the wind among the barley, Roger's grave face flickered into sudden laughter, when he glanced at Heber's long solemn face. As he laughed he glanced back to the entrance of the grey quadrangle of the house, where in the mellow shadow of ancient granite a woman stood in white blouse and dark skirt, shading her eyes with her hand, as she watched the two men. Mary Congden had been admitted to the secret reason of Roger's visit to Heber, and her eyes laughed back in answer to the younger man's glance. For Heber was now serving the Congdens



of Chittleford, instead of Tryphena White, and for the last six months had never so much as crossed the moors and network of lanes that lay between Uppacott and Chittleford. But Tryphena wanted him back so sorely that she was prepared to go to any length, and Roger had been entrusted with the embassy of reconciliation.

"As she said to me," said Roger, his deep voice booming across the summer murmur as pleasantly to Mary Congden's ears as ever a man's did, "if she'd had you by she'd never have lost the brindled cow. And now every calving's a terror to her."

"Ay, lost her nerve, poor sawl," said Heber, purringly, "and lost the brindled, too—tchu, tchu, tchu. It never ought to ha' been. And a fox ate her two broods o' young ducks, you say. Talking o' ducks," he added, lowering his voice and glancing at Mary, "you never seed such gackums as they be here about cooking. Why, the very sage and onions be so wammicky that it wouldn't bring tears to the eyes of a two-year old." He dropped his arms deprecatingly, as though the wordless hour had come.

"And," said Roger, giving another turn to the persuasive screw, "the lad she's got now won't get up mornings, till he's been called four times."

"And missus by then neither to hold nor to bind, but I'm glad her knows when her's lost a good thing in yours truly."

"But it isn't lost, if you're going back."

"But I bain't going," said Heber, firmly; "not if her was to crook on her pins afore me by the hour together. I tell 'ee her's never been the same woman since little Mrs. Wilmot went and left her. It's my belief the trouble of it struck deep, and it's good if it don't bring her home along churchyard way. A little rip, that little Mrs. Wilmot, so to call her what she rightful was. The sly little cuss, never to let on that she'd one good man a' ready. But what comes

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over me is that missus should ha' knowed it all along. Missus—that fair foamed to see so much as a chap arm in crook with his maid !”

“Then, if you won't go back on any other terms,” said Roger, disregarding the red-herring of another topic laid across his path by Heber, “on what terms will you go back ? For I'm commissioned to get you back some way, even if I've to offer you higher wages, or—but you'll never believe it, when I tell you.”

“'Pon the Book,” said Heber, with a grin, “you look just as solemn as if missus was to ask me to marry her.”

“And that's just what she does ask. She thinks that perhaps it would be best, for then no one could say a word against the two of you living as you've done.”

Heber was awed into sudden silence. Then he burst out—

“So that's the upsides of it, is it ? I thought her turned me out sudden-like every evening, just when 'twas getting warmish inside by the fire, and I'd barely so much as had my two mugs o' zider.”

“And she says you needn't bother to say a word. Just come back and walk in. She'll have the ring ready, and you can toddle down when the banns have been called and there need be nothing said between the two of you. And things can go on the same afterwards as if you'd never been to church.”

“That's better now. For 'tis jawing as always galled me when I've been minded to think upon a faymale. Well, you've put it fair and I dunno but what it's a good notion.”

Heber drew himself up, ten years younger in his own estimation.

“But,” said he as an ultimatum, “if I come back I'll not tramp it. I'll have a carriage from the Green Man ; 'twill be as good as a wedding tower.”

"And," said Roger, as he joined Mary Congden, "it's never dawned on the old fellow that it'll be a saving to Tryphena, the old vixen, not to have to pay him wages. There isn't a man born that Tryphena wouldn't be upsides with. I'm glad he'll have a bit of a wedding 'tower' in the drive from here to Uppacott. It'll be the one extravagance of his lifetime—I'll take my oath."

"So you've managed to get a good servant from us. Father will not thank you for that," said Mary Congden, laughing.

"Suppose I ask him for something more valuable than that, Mary. Do you think I should get it?"

As they stood together in the quadrangle, where the lozenge-shaped windows gleamed in a thousand facets, they both glanced at the heart-shaped moulding placed over the doorway by the unknown eighteenth-century builder. As Mary did not affect to misunderstand him, but lifted her quiet eyes to his, he went on less deliberately—

"You've known me as a boy, and you've known me well the last few months. And you've been very good to me."

She turned away abstractedly and began to pluck the fuchsia bells that grew against the grey wall. They both saw the scene of old Mr. Hannaford's death, where Mary Congden had played the part of daughter. She seemed even now, though she was not at all fanciful, to hear the old man's whisper: "Not for me, O Lord, not for me," even in this sun-warmed, hay-scented stillness. But when Mr. Fearing had drawn near the river the waters were very low, and his clouded soul was free from trouble at the end.

"Do you remember," said Roger, seeing eye for eye with her, "how you sang for father?"

She nodded, remembering her start when the old man cried out: "Mary, you haven't sung for years. Don't you mind the old song you used to sing when I was courting you?"

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'Young Harry,' it was, for you used to tease me with it." But it was on another Mary than Mary Congden that his thoughts had run.

"I shall never forget," said Roger, "how your voice came from behind the bed. How does it go?"

"'Young Harry's the lad for me,  
Tall and straight as a poplar tree,  
He looks like a squire of high degree,  
When dressed in his Sunday clothes,  
When dressed in his Sunday clothes.'

That's what you sang, Mary."

"Yes," said she gently.

For to the sound of no angelic choirs had Mr. Hannaford fallen asleep, and if he woke to other and more celestial songs, he, maybe, found none sweeter than the old song of his courting days.

"Say, Mary, will you have me?" said Roger, at last, stooping his head gently to hers as he stood bareheaded in the sunlight which showed up the grey locks thick on his head.

Mary's grey eyes shone, as she said gravely—

"Are you sure, Roger?"

It was a question that brought back to him quite another woman than Mary Congden, in whose voice there now sounded a curious lisp that came to her in moments of trouble.

"For," she said, "I'm a quiet woman, not a bit clever like—such as you should marry."

"I'm sure I shall find none sweeter. And, Mary, if there's aught to forgive in me—for I know you're thinking of a time when I was mad for——"

"A very different woman."

"A very different woman, thank God."

It was Wilmot's epitaph, or so it seemed to Mary Congden.

"And she lost you, Roger," she said, with a simplicity that was native to her. "How she bore it I cannot tell."

"Then you do care?"

"Gracious, Roger," she flashed, "how else could I have borne to have you come and watch me, day after day, till I upset the milk and trod on the cat? I'm no good at amusing anybody, and a man more difficult to amuse than you couldn't be found."

"Then we'll marry at once, for not even a cold-blooded woman like you could have the cruelty to try to amuse her husband."

"We'd better have a double wedding, with Heber and Tryphena to lead off," she laughed, as she led the way into the house.

In the house they came upon a visitor. Chittleford was periodically subject to the incursions of an avenging fury, known to the inhabitants as Aunt Heps. This lady now sat in an easy-chair in the dining-room, from which she had been watching the proceedings in the courtyard. Three leading lines of action were Aunt Heps's:—first, saving; second, cleaning; third, putting the world right—that is, scarifying, as Roger called it. Aunt Heps had a softer side; but as this usually only appeared in the sick-room, when the patient was in *extremis*, or thereabouts, a good many people knew her intimately for many years without being aware of its existence.

A comely woman she was in some ways—especially at funerals, when her sharp black eyes were downcast, and a spirit of gentle gloom reigned over her well-scrubbed features. Hair, almost blue-black, coarse and abundant, was severely parted in front and drawn into a tight-packed lump behind. A hairy mole on the chin seemed the most vivacious trait of all, and always struck terror to the hearts of children. In dress she was noted for general skimpiness

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of material and tightness of fit ; it has indeed been supposed that at seasons of disrobing a series of resonant detonations was to be heard proceeding from Aunt Heps's room.

To Roger she appeared at the moment like the dogging fate of old age, since in Mary Congden's face there were repeated some of Aunt Heps's features. But it was Mary herself who smoothed away his fears when, as she stood to say good-bye to Roger, he whispered, with a glance at the room where Aunt Heps was still venting gall.

"You'll never grow like her, will you, little wife?"

For she answered : "Ah, poor soul, she's never had what I shall have to keep me sweet."

"And what's that?"

He knew, but the pleasure lay in her answer.

"You know," she whispered, while he held her face in the circle of his big hands.

It was very pleasant, riding home through the teeming life of summer, never far from the sound of waters and the sight of the granite-peaked tora. For Roger Hannaford felt himself at home, surely at home in these surroundings, a man in touch with his environment at last. He had by now gone, step by step, into the valley of weakness which is white with the bones of those who might have done valiantly. Standing in the depths of that valley, he had seen the crags of conscious failure throwing their long dark shadows, till the sun of the world seemed a blackness, for there is nothing which can so thoroughly make us feel that life is a failure as the consciousness of failure in ourselves. It is your bustling, pushing fellow, who is always hitting the top of the goose-berry bush, that is at any time ready to believe in the possibility of hitting the moon.

And then he had come out of the valley—but not on the side by which he had descended, for that none but heroes can accomplish, and Roger was no hero. The pain

of the world, the sense of the misery of vicious living, and the shamelessness of selfish money-grabbing—he had honestly felt it all; but even before Wilmot came into his life, he had begun to eat of that deadly poison plant that grows close to the high-road in all ages, the plant that bears the name *Cui bono?* To what end, the struggle of scientist, thinker, and fighter? To what end the cleanness of everyday human life? To what end the dance of the gay hours—to those who can get gay hours?

Then came Wilmot, and in the hot zest of her life he had learnt that the root of his failure lay, not in the conditions of the outer life with which he had tried to cope, but in himself, where all failure lies. He could neither cut the throat of his desires nor feed their hunger, and one of these two things strong men must always do. In the first moment of his dearly bought knowledge of himself he acquiesced in everything, even in his father's binding clause to retain the lands of Ponsworthy solely for the purpose of personal gain. In the event of Roger's ever attempting to use them for commercial or industrial purposes, the whole property was to pass to a distant branch of the Hannaford family.

By now he knew that the decision was the right one; this plain, everyday life, where just, clean ways lay before him for his treading, was native to his mind. Here he was at home in his surroundings, as he would never have been in the struggle he had once thought of joining. Thus he had indeed come up from the valley of failure, but on the other side.

It has been wisely said that each age strikes its one predominant note in the scale of human activity; it is by their will that we recognize the Elizabethans, by the will that drove them over the seas of passion, as well as over the seas that ebb and flow with the salt tides. It is by their

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thoughts, so much higher than their emotions, that we know the men of the eighteenth century; and by their quick sensibility to the sting of life, the men of the nineteenth. Roger was quick enough to the sensitive power of his own age, but he could not take the further step that would have brought him into the dawning age that is following the nineteenth.

For, from a sensitive "correspondence with environment," our race has passed into another stage; it is marked now by a passionate desire for the mastery of life—a desire, spiritualized in the highest lives, materialized in the lowest, so to mould environment that the lives to come may be shaped to our will. It is this which accounts for that curious likeness in our to-day with that of the Elizabethans; their spirit was the untamed will, but our will moves in other paths than theirs, paths beaten for our treading by the ages between.

It was in this spiritualized passion for the mastery of life that Roger could not share; he could not even share in Wilmot's revolt against the traditions, man-made, that hedged her in. Law-loving, sweet-faced, tender-hearted Mary Congden was the fitter mate for him.

Yet, as he stood in the porch of Ponsworthy, with the peat-smell in his nostrils and the tick-tack, tick-tack of the old clocks in his ears, it was backwards into the past that he looked, at a certain "little rip," the challenge of whose passionate appeal he had been unable to answer. Could he have looked into the other thing that even then existed, into the future, he would have seen another Wilmot, his own and Mary Congdon's, fighting for the mastery of evil in a way that could never have been his, for it was a woman's way, and, after all, woman is, say all the scribes, creation's very last word, and, as some of the pundits will have it, her best.



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### SUNSET AND DAWN

Two years later, on the hill above Stoke Michael, Johanna opened the packet that had come for her by post that morning. Now the contents lay open on her lap, whilst Elizabeth pushed her face against her mother's arm, as the two sat together on the moss-covered bench that caps the hill.

"Mother, you aren't cold, are you?" asked Elizabeth, looking up at Johanna's face, when she felt the quiver with which Johanna looked at the photograph she held in her hand.

"Who is it?" asked Elizabeth.

"It's somebody I knew many years ago, child."

"Why, that can't be, for it's only a dinky little baby, much, much younger'n me."

"Eh, child, there's folks us knows years and years afore us sets eyes on 'em," said Johanna, peering in the growing dusk at the child's face and bare round limbs that lay, as it were, across her knee.

Then she turned to the note that accompanied it. "Johanna," Wilmot wrote, "I thought you must see our lassie, for she would not have been in the world at all but for you. In one way she is as much yours as mine. Never think I don't know all we've cost you, old Johanna. And, though he never says a word, Tony knows it too. For I can read things in him now that I should never have read in the old days, when I made so many mistakes and saddened so many hearts, my dear. But I don't dwell much on that, for I've so much to do that I cannot brood. And the same

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must be true with you. Tony mystifies people here, as he did in Challacombe. His last exploit was to place a row of my old bonnets on our wall, with a notice, 'Please help yourself.' A good many people passed that day, but nobody took one, for indeed, Johanna, my bonnets are very shabby, and most people here are better off than we. Tony, of course, says it was due to the frightful taste shown in them."

But the writer could not long keep off the child, and the last sentence ran—

"Our baby loved the snow so much last year."

Somehow, to Johanna the words called up a picture of what had happened at Challacombe one winter. She remembered Dr. Tony picking up Wilmot on a rare evening of snow, and carrying her across the road from Dashpers to Captain Penrice's house. The little picture stirred a chord of feeling that Johanna had fancied long since deadened, and at the sense of her loneliness she shivered again.

Now once more it was winter, and the red fires of sunset gleamed over leafless trees on the hilltops, and over the blue shadows of the valleys. Below them the Dart lay in gleaming pools of silver light, as she had seen it hundreds of times before, as it had often gleamed in that great time of Johanna's life, when she and the doctor fought the plague. It was a very precious recollection, and of our recollections none can rob us, though the present was often hard to Johanna, prosperous as she was.

Hardest of all, perhaps, when she remembered that some day the child would have to learn the way she came. For the older folk, who bear the scars of battle, dread the clear young eyes that often mark the scars and never note the fruits of victory gained by those same scars. Thus the hidden fear of Johanna's life lay in the question of how Elizabeth would judge her when she knew. So

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dreading, she stared into the sunset, while the child, her face reddened by the reflected glory, looked up at her.

"Crying, Mums?"

"No, child; I'm not so sad as that," said Johanna. "I'm only thinking of my other baby, that's in this picture."

For, indeed, the sunset is not cheerless, even if it be the sunset of our own lives, whilst we can still look forward to the human dawn that rises in those other lives that spring from ours, the lives that shall pursue "the things that are more excellent."